

Four killed in Iran explosions

TEHRAN (AP) — Four people were killed and three wounded Tuesday in two explosions of suspicious objects in a suburban community west of Tehran, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported. Two brothers and a third man were killed instantly in the first explosion Tuesday morning near a paint factory in a suburb of Karaj, about 40 kilometers west of the capital, the agency said. Three hours later, a second explosion killed a police guard and wounded two men under his command, IRNA said. It listed a third person as wounded but gave no details. The agency said "suspicious objects" exploded in both cases, but gave no further indication if sabotage was involved.

Jordan Times

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Hundreds of thousands greet King on his return



His Majesty King Hussein, accompanied by Her Majesty Queen Noor, greets His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan after his return to Amman (AP photo). The King offers a prayer of thanksgiving following his safe return to Jordan (Photo by Yousef Al-Allan)



Jordanians undeterred by rain, weather in celebrating King's return

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — Neither the rainfall nor the chilly weather could prevent hundreds of thousands of Jordanians from thronging the streets to welcome His Majesty King Hussein on Tuesday, following his arrival in Amman after undergoing six months of cancer chemotherapy in the U.S.

Men, women, children, boy scouts, students and traditional folk groups from all over the country celebrated the King's return by singing, dancing, beating drums and waving banners that said "Long live Al Hussein," "Thank God for His Majesty's return" and "We sacrifice our soul and blood for you [King Hussein]."

In the streets of downtown, crowds challenged driving rain and cold weather, chanting "Hashmi Hashmi," a popular song honouring King Hussein's origin from Hashem, the grandfather of Prophet Mohammad, while shopkeepers offered sweets and coffee to passers-by and a folk dancing troupe twirled swords and played bagpipes.

"Look at the rain, even heaven is celebrating His Majesty's blessed return. No words can describe this moment," one vendor told the *Jordan Times*, while he danced carefree in his drenched clothes.

The government Saturday officially announced a state of drought and plans to cope with the problem after months of low amounts of rainfall.

King Hussein, piloting a plane, which was escorted by 12 military jets, circled the airport and over the capital before landing yesterday at 3 p.m. at the military airport.

The rain did not stop the King from standing up through his limousine's large sunroof to wave to the jubilant crowds as he made his way through a 25-kilometre route to his home in western Amman.

Jordanians lined the route to catch a glimpse of their King.

Children were heedless of the rain while they were clapping, singing and some of them crying.

"I'm crying because once I thought I might lose our King and father," said one orphaned child, his cheeks flushed red from tears, rain and cold.

Well-wishers sang and threw flowers as the Royal motorcade passed through the streets decorated with coloured lights, flags and banners proclaiming "Welcome Back Al Hussein" and "Yoo Retom Like the Sool to The Body."

Downtown shopkeepers said they were optimistic that their businesses will flourish with the King's return.

"With His Majesty's homecoming, I have a strong feeling that my sales are about to improve after months of an uncertain economic situation," said a boutique owner.

On Sunday, King Hussein, in an address to the nation from London, declared his full recovery and announced that he planned to launch a comprehensive review of the country's progress and challenges facing it.

"Whatever His Majesty decides to do, we will be supporting him all the way as he is our King and leader, and we believe he will achieve the best for our nation," a young lawyer said in a comment on the King's announcement.

King Hussein left Jordan

in mid-July to undergo treatment for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The 63-year-old King received a clean bill of health after a stem-cell transplant at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, in the U.S.

Soldiers trying to keep eager crowds at bay along the sidewalks yesterday were unable to convince an old woman that, like everyone else, she had to greet King Hussein from the sidewalk. After minutes of gestures and negotiations, the good-natured soldiers gave in, and the hajjeh remained in the street as motorcycle cruised by.

Buildings were decorated with the King's pictures, huge flags and series of flashing lights. Bedouin leaders pitched tents in some streets and brought in camels and sheep to slaughter in a traditional sacrificial gesture.

Talk shows on the radio and television have been swamped with calls from Jordanians declaring allegiance to the King.

Al Hashmiyah Square and public parks were jammed with celebrants, who included members of the Circassian and Iraqi Assyrian communities dancing and singing traditional songs.

Emotions ran high also in Palestinian refugee camps, where hundreds of people joined the celebrations and chanted slogans praising King Hussein.

Speaking to reporters shortly after his return, King Hussein announced that there is "a lot to be done" to consolidate the future of Jordan.

Similar activities took place in all districts around the Kingdom as part of the celebrations, which started long before the leader's planned arrival, the largest in Amman since September 1992, when the country welcomed King Hussein in his first statement to the media after arriving.

The King expressed his deep appreciation and thanks to the Jordanian people

King welcomed home by Royal family, foreign leaders and citizens

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — His Majesty King Hussein returned to Jordan yesterday to a jubilant reception from his family, local and foreign dignitaries and citizens who have been eager to see the Hashemite leader after six months of absence from the Kingdom.

Moments after piloting his G-4 plane into Marka military airport, the King stepped down from the aircraft and prayed.

It was the first time he had touched Jordanian soil since he left the country last July for the U.S., where he underwent chemotherapy to treat non-Hodgkins lymphoma.

Accompanied by Her Majesty Queen Noor, who has been at the King's side throughout his half-year ordeal, King Hussein embraced his family and was welcomed by scores of senior officials, Parliament members, diplomats and other dignitaries.

The King was also greeted by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifa Al Thani and Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who came just to participate in Jordan's celebrations of the King's homecoming.

The King's aircraft was escorted as it entered Jordan's airspace by 12 F-16 and Mirage jet fighters.

Speaking on his months of treatment, King Hussein thanked Queen Noor, whom he said "has been through a lot... and has had to deal with unpleasant surprises."

"The fact is that my small Jordanian family was with me and beside me, in particular Her Majesty Queen Noor, who suffered with me a great deal as I did in the face of the unpleasant surprises."

The King also expressed his pride in the Hashemite family, saying, "My brother Prince Mohammad and my sister Princess Basmah have donated blood for me as did my children, particularly Prince Hamzeh, who is not among us today as he is undergoing training at Sandhurst military academy. They have not left me a single moment throughout the whole period."

King Hussein praised the Jordanian family's unity, saying, "We hope that the future will hold everything good for us."

He expressed deep pride in his brothers, the leaders and kings of the Arab and friendly nations who visited him in the U.S. and maintained contact with him.

Monarch receives messages of congratulations from world leaders

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein on Tuesday received telephone calls from Syrian President Hafez Assad and Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah Ben Abdul Aziz, who congratulated him on his recovery and safe return home.

President Assad and Prince Abdullah expressed their heartfelt congratulations to the King and the Jordanian people and safe return home.

King Hussein continued his good health and happiness.

King Hussein expressed thanks and appreciation to President Assad and Prince Abdullah for their congratulations and brotherly feelings.

The King also received messages from several world leaders congratulating him on his recovery and safe return home.

King Hussein received a message from French President Jacques Chirac congratulating him on his recovery and safe return home.

In this respect, he said, "I will try to contact them all..."

Libya's leader Muammar Qaddafi, my brothers in Saudi Arabia, and Prince Abdullah [of Saudi Arabia] has overwhelmed me with his kindness. I came to know him more than any time in the past... a true Arab in the full sense of the word, as well as King Fahd Ben Abdal Aziz, Prince Sultan... all of them in the Arabian Gulf, in addition to President Mubarak, King Hassan of Morocco my cousin, the brothers in Tunisia and Algeria and elsewhere. They maintained constant contact with me, thank God."

King Hussein also thanked the leaders of the Arab and friendly countries who were on hand to welcome him or had sent representatives for the occasion.

About half an hour after his arrival, the King rode

through the streets of Amman cheered by citizens young and old along the 25-km route to his home, Bab Al Salam, in Hummar. For most of the ride and through a cold rain, the King stood waving to the crowds through the sunroof of his limousine, with Queen Noor seated at his side.

The King left Tuesday morning from London,

where he had been recuperating since being discharged from the Mayo Clinic in the United States.

His doctors there said he was fully recovered. The King is expected to return to the Mayo for check-ups in March.

More foreign dignitaries are expected to arrive in Amman in the coming days to congratulate King Hussein on his recovery and safe return.

The King's return brought

around 250 foreign journalists to Amman to report on the homecoming. World networks like CNN had live coverage of the King's arrival and motorcade through the capital.

Minister General Sheikh Mohammad Ben Rashid Al Maktoum is due to visit Jordan today to convey to the King the greetings of the emir of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Zayed Ben Sultan Al Nahyan, and vice president, prime minister and ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Maktoum Ben Rashid Al Maktoum.

Sheikh Mohammad will be accompanied by a high-level delegation.

Another senior Bahrain official is expected to arrive today in Amman to congratulate the King on his recovery and safe return.

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Yugoslav scientist says Kosovo bodies not massacred

PRISTINA (R) — The head of the Yugoslav forensic team examining the bodies of 40 ethnic Albanians who the West says were massacred by Serb police said on Tuesday they bore no signs of having been executed. "Not a single body bears any sign of execution," Saso Dobricanin told Reuters. "The bodies were not massacred," Dobricanin said the autopsy would probably take three to four days. "It is going very, very slowly," he said. He said, however, that it was already clear that William Walker, head of the international monitors in Kosovo, had been mistaken. Walker had accused the Serb police of executing at least 20 of the victims, who were killed on Friday. "But the main thing which is already obvious is that Walker was wrong when he said these people were massacred," Dobricanin said (see earlier stories on page 4).

Ex-U.N. official says sanctions on Iraq amount to 'genocide'

PARIS (R) — The former coordinator of the United Nations oil-for-food programme in Iraq said on Tuesday U.N. sanctions amounted to genocide and ending them would do more to weaken the Iraqi leadership than maintaining them.

Denis Halliday, an Irishman and self-described pacifist who resigned in protest at U.N. policies in Iraq last September after more than 30 years at the agency, praised a French plan to ease international sanctions on Baghdad.

But, in an appearance before the French National Assembly's Franco-Iraq Study Group, he said U.N. members must do even more to assist Baghdad and urged them to help finance Iraq's reconstruction, which he said

would cost \$50-60 billion. He also urged the United Nations to postpone Iraq's reparations payments, imposed after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait, "until the death of Iraqi children ceases."

"I don't like the word genocide. I think it's perhaps too dramatic. But the fact is, can you find a better word to describe this sort of catastrophe?" he told Reuters following his parliamentary remarks.

Halliday, 57, is touring Europe to lobby for an end to the U.N. sanctions, which he blames for the death of 5,000 to 6,000 Iraqis a month and as many as 600,000 children since 1990.

He was in Rome last week and heads for Britain on Saturday. Paris has proposed phasing

out the U.N. ban on Iraqi oil sales, replacing intrusive weapons inspections with a looser system of arms monitoring, and continuing supervision of how Iraq spends the money it earns from oil exports.

Halliday said sanctions had only strengthened Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. "If the embargo was removed, Saddam Hussein would be weakened and in due course an opposition can perhaps grow within the country," he told the parliamentary group.

The Paris plan has been warmly praised by Security Council members China and Russia but got a cooler reception from Britain and the United States, which want to be sure Iraq has destroyed all its weapons of mass destruction before lifting the embargos.

"The responsibility for this chaos must be shared by all of us who are members of the United Nations, and particularly the United States and the United Kingdom," which bombed Iraq last month over its refusal to cooperate with U.N. weapons inspectors, said Halliday.

"I can't imagine what [British Prime Minister] Tony Blair was doing, because he seems to have isolated himself not only in Europe but in Britain," he added.

French deputy Roselyne Bachelot-Narquin, who organised Tuesday's hearing, said six deputies would travel to Iraq on Jan. 28 for a week-long visit to review the humanitarian situation and assess the damage from last month's bombings.

Second break-in at offices of Barak's advisor

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Capitol Hill offices of a prominent Democratic pollster advising Ehud Barak, a candidate for prime minister of Israel, apparently have been burglarised for the second time in a week, according to Metropolitan Police.

An employee of Greenberg Quinlan Inc. discovered the apparent break-in about 6:45 a.m. said police spokesman Sgt. Joe Gentile.

Police say the offices were broken into sometime after 4 p.m. Monday.

"It appears burglars entered the offices through a side skylight window on the second floor," Gentile said.

The firm, which is advising the campaign of Barak, a leading opposition candidate to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, was burglarised last week.

Netanyahu's Likud Party denied any involvement in the earlier incident which had been dubbed the "Israeli Watergate" in Washington and Jerusalem, in a reference to the burglary of Democratic Party headquarters at the Watergate office building that led to President Richard Nixon's 1974 resignation. It had been the most recent in a series of break-ins at homes and offices of Barak aides and advisers.

Khatami seen as winner in row with state television

TEHRAN (R) — Iran's state-run television came under fire on Tuesday over an interview with a conservative cleric who had accused backers of President Mohammad Khatami of being behind a series of murders of moderate intellectuals.

A top state committee condemned the television station for the interview and demanded that those responsible for the programme be punished.

Iranian analysts saw the decision as a victory for the moderate president over the conservative-run state media and another step forward for his liberal political and cultural reforms.

The interview, which included no rebuttal, had provoked a strong reaction by moderate groups. Khatami's cabinet member Ali Larjani, the head of the television and radio, from attending its meetings and demanded an apology.

Khatami welcomed the ruling of the committee, set up in agreement with Larjani, and suggested that the media chief was again welcome to attend cabinet meetings, the television said.

Khatami, who has advocated

granting greater liberties, also expressed hope in a statement that Iran's "atmosphere of criticism and freedom of speech... would not become a place for baseless judgements or libel and abusive language," it added.

Iranian political analysts said the ruling against the television, whose head is named by Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was unprecedented.

Khamenei outranks Khatami.

"This is another step forward for Khatami's reforms... Up to now, the radio and television had obstinately carried one-sided programmes without any accountability to the public," said Iraj Jamshidi, editor of the business daily *Abrar-e-Eqtesadi*.

Conservatives still hold key levers of power — including the armed and security forces, courts and state media — despite Khatami's wide popularity after his 1997 landslide election.

"This is the first time the government, which does not control the radio and television, has managed to force the head of these media to say he

did not know about a programme in order to avoid further pressure from public opinion, the press and Khatami's supporters," Jamshidi told Reuters.

The state committee said Larjani was not informed about the interview, which was seen by moderates as an attempt by conservatives to deflect charges that the murders were part of a plan by hardliners to destabilise Khatami's government.

Ten people, including agents of the conservative-run secret police, have been held for alleged involvement in the murders.

At least two outspoken dissidents and two liberal writers were killed by death-squads. A third author died under mysterious circumstances and a fourth is missing and presumed dead.

A committee set up by Khatami to investigate the murders said on Sunday that none of Iran's mainstream factions was behind the killings.

On Monday Khamenei called on conservatives and moderates to end their bitter row over the political murders.

Abdullah Ocalan sought

political support in Europe. But he left Italy last week for an undisclosed location.

Greek newspapers reported Ocalan was in Belarus, but his precise whereabouts are unknown.

The conflict between the PKK and Turkish military has killed about 37,000 people. But Ocalan suggested the PKK would call off its armed struggle and seek political pressure on Turkey, which regards the PKK as a terrorist group.

The comments by Yilmaz in the Ethnos interview, however, give an entirely different picture of the PKK's plans.

The 15-year fight for autonomy by Kurdish rebels in southeastern Turkey moved onto the international stage in November following the arrest of the PKK's leader in Rome.

Abdullah Ocalan sought

political asylum and tried to

Ultra-Orthodox rabbi unveils Palestinian peace proposal

TEL AVIV (AFP) — An ultra-Orthodox rabbi put forward a radical peace proposal Tuesday suggesting Israel allow the creation of a Palestinian state with Arab east Jerusalem as its capital in exchange for Palestinian acceptance of massive Jewish settlement of the West Bank.

The plan was drawn up by Rabbi Yaakov Shulewitz, a close aide to the influential spiritual leader of the Degel Hatorah party, Rabbi Eliezer Shach.

This project is aimed at reassuring the [Jewish] settlers while remaining loyal to the thinking of Rabbi Shach," Shulewitz told AFP.

The peace proposal calls for Israel to permit the creation of an independent Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.

It foresees a major expansion of the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem to include nearby Jewish settlements on the West Bank while at the same time

granting Palestinians control over Arab sectors of occupied east Jerusalem.

In exchange, Israel would demand the right for several hundred thousand more Jews to live on the West Bank under Israeli jurisdiction.

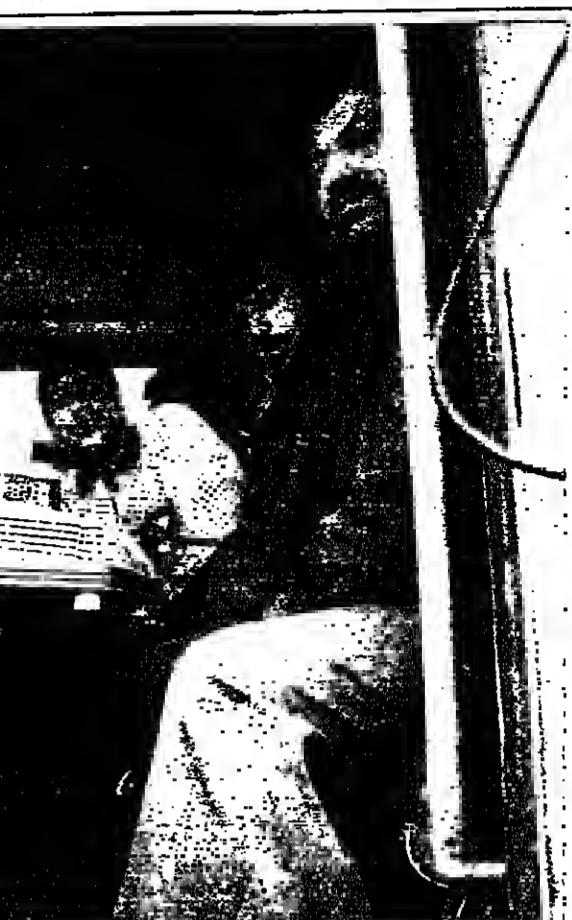
The plan as outlined by Shulewitz did not mention precise boundaries for the Palestinian state or specific areas for settlement by Jews on the West Bank.

"Rabbi Shach has never opposed the

principle of withdrawal from the West Bank," he said.

"According to Rabbi Shach, the West Bank is a territory occupied militarily by Israel and not given by God, so withdrawal poses no theological problems," he said.

Degel Hatorah is one of two ultra-Orthodox factions in the United Torah Judaism Party which makes up part of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling coalition.



PALESTINIAN PRISONERS RELEASED: Palestinian prisoners Tuesday carry a model of the Dome of the Rock while they wait to be allowed to go home after they were released from an Israeli jail. Israel agreed to free some 30 Palestinian prisoners as a gesture of goodwill for the 'Eid Al Fitr festival marking the end of Ramadan (Reuters photo)

PKK will attack Turkish cities, spokesman says

ATHENS (AP) — A Kurdish rebel leader is threatening intensified attacks inside Turkey and says his group will target major cities.

Kani Yilmaz, identified as European spokesman for the Kurdish Labour Party, or PKK, made the remarks in an interview with the Athens daily Ethnos. Kani Yilmaz is an alias used by Faysal Dunaylchi, who has in the past served as the PKK's European spokesman, according to the Kurdish sources.

"The expansion of the war inside Turkey must be considered certain," he told Ethnos.

The 15-year fight for autonomy by Kurdish rebels in southeastern Turkey moved onto the international stage in November following the arrest of the PKK's leader in Rome.

Abdullah Ocalan sought

political support in Europe.

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Abdullah Ocalan sought

NEWS IN BRIEF

'Iran wants to buy U.S. commodities'

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Iran in December placed an order for more than \$500 million worth of U.S. grain and sugar, which is under consideration by the U.S. government. The Washington Post said Tuesday. Some administration officials told the daily the grain purchase order may be an artifact, aimed at setting the precedent of an approved transaction without consummating a deal, since Iran could purchase some of the commodities from other countries at cheaper prices. The request, submitted to the Treasury Department on Dec. 14, is for two million tonnes of wheat, 400,000 tonnes of corn, 300,000 tonnes of rice, 400,000 tonnes of sugar and 200,000 tonnes of soy bean meal, the daily said.

Supporters of dissident Iranian arrested

TEHRAN (AFP) — Several supporters of dissident Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri, the disgraced former heir to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, have been arrested in the central city of Esfahan, a newspaper reported Tuesday. "Several people were arrested after shouting slogans in favour of Ayatollah Montazeri," said the radical newspaper Salam. It said the arrests took place on Monday after prayers for 'Eid Al Fitr marking the end of the Holy Month of Ramadan. The paper said some 70,000 worshippers had attended the prayer service in Esfahan on Monday addressed by Ayatollah Jalaleddin Taheri, a senior cleric considered a supporter of Montazeri and reformist President Mohammad Khatami.

Irish, Israeli PMs hold talks

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern met Tuesday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the start of a two-day visit which will also include talks with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. As Ahern arrived at the prime minister's office in Jerusalem, Netanyahu said he would give him a message to deliver to Arafat to the effect that if the Palestinians stick to their commitments under October's Wye River agreement then there could be progress in the peace talks.

Hostages held in Yemen over jailed tribesman

SANA (AFP) — The tribal kidnappers of a Dutch family and British couple in Yemen are demanding the release of a jailed tribesman, a Dutch diplomat said Tuesday. "The kidnappers' demand, it seems, is for the release of a tribe member in prison," said Pieter Dorst, deputy head of mission at the Netherlands embassy. "The [Yemeni] government is in touch with them [the kidnappers]," Dorst told AFP. He declined to give details on the mediation efforts, in the second such kidnapping this month.

JORDAN TELEVISION Tel. 4773111-19 PROGRAMME TWO

12:00 "The Adventures of Hickleyberry Fin"

01:30 "Cartoon 'Red Beard'"

01:30 Feature Film "Heck's Way Home"

15:00 "The American Chat Show"

15:45 "Circus"

16:15 "Vid Kids"

15:00 "French Varieties"

18:15 "Omar Ben Abdil Aziz"

19:00 "Le Journal"

19:15 "French programme"

19:30 "News Headlines"

19:35 Comedy — 2 Points 4 Children

20:00 "Envoye Special of French Prog."

20:30 "Drama NYPD"

21:30 "Mini Series 'Playing the Field'" Eps. 4

22:00 "News in English"

22:00 Feature Film "With a song in My Heart"

PRAYER TIMES

05:10 "Fajr"

06:31 "Sunrise/Dhuha"

11:46 "Dhuhr"

14:38 "Asr"

17:02 "Maghreb"

18:23 "Isha"

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church

Sweileh Tel. 5920740

Assemblies of God Church Tel.

4632785

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the

Department of Meteorology

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

Dr. Abdul Hadi Tayyin

462015

Dr. Wissam Hizayin

4748563

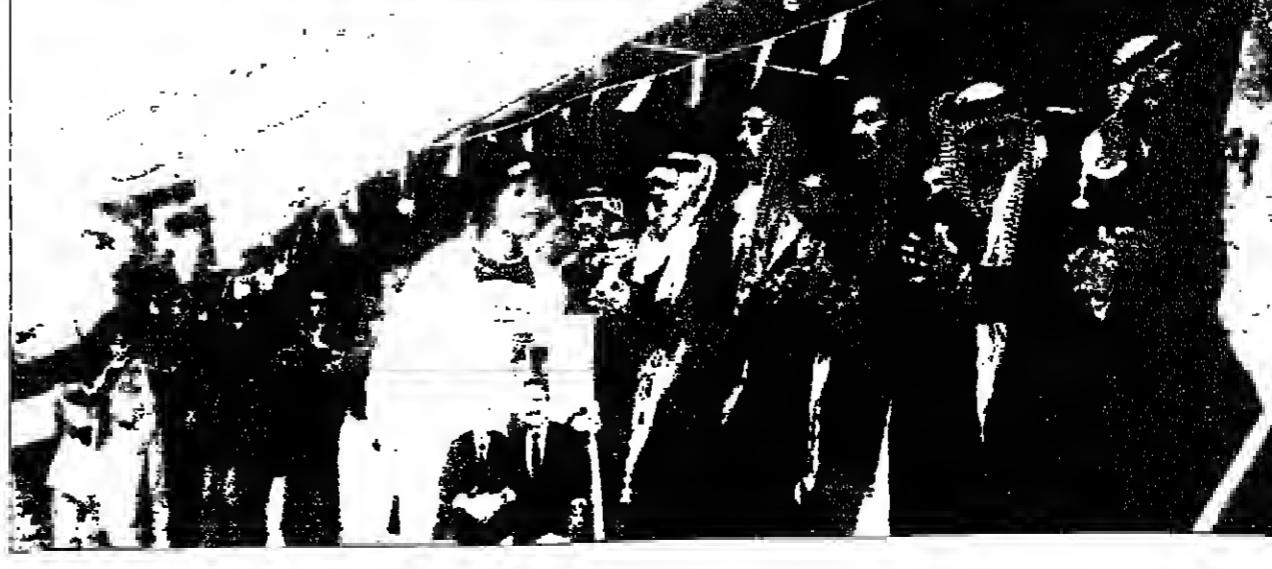
Dr. Omar Yassine

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Water Authority

5680100

Jordan welcomes King Hussein



AT LONG LAST, KING HUSSEIN RETURNS TO JORDAN: Top row: From left to right, Their Royal Highnesses Prince Hashem, Princess Haya and Prince Ali Ben Hussein wait to greet His Majesty King Hussein at Marka Airport; King Hussein waves to Jordanians from his motorcade; His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan and Her Royal Highness Princess Basma wait to greet King Hussein: Row 2: From left to right, His Majesty King Hussein steps onto Jordanian soil for the first time in six months; King Hussein peers through the top of his car in the Royal Motorcade: Rows 3 and 4: Jordanians throng the streets in anticipation of King Hussein's cruise through the city on the way to Bab Al Salam Palace (Photos by Yousef Allan, Associated Press and Agence France Presse)

Divided Security Council fails to pin massacre blame

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. Security Council has strongly condemned the massacre of 45 ethnic Albanians in Kosovo but pointedly refrained from pinning responsibility for the killings on any one party.

The council scheduled a second meeting to consider more condemnations and calls for Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to cooperate with war crimes investigators and peace monitors.

But there was virtually no chance the council would agree to "quick and effective U.N. intervention," which Albanian Foreign Minister Paskal Milo had asked for in a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Disagreements over how to handle the escalating crisis in Kosovo have resulted in a muted response from the 15-member council. Monday, an emergency meeting produced a press statement reflecting the few areas of agreement.

The statement called for a full investigation of the massacre, urged all parties to cooperate with the inter-

national war crimes tribunal, and called on the Yugoslav government to rescind its decision to expel the head of the peace mission in the embattled Serb province.

Diplomats were working late Monday on the draft of a more authoritative presidential statement to be considered by the council today. Some delegations, including the United States and France, were pushing for it to be stronger.

The United States wanted the council to condemn Yugoslavia's refusal Monday to allow chief U.N. war crimes prosecutor Louise Arbour to enter the country to investigate the atrocity in the village of Racak.

But diplomats said Russia and China blocked any mention of Arbour, saying they wanted to consult their governments.

Lavrov said Moscow had no official information on Arbour's failed attempt to enter Yugoslavia and wanted to verify reports that she was carrying NATO orders.

U.S. envoy Nancy Soderberg said the United States was still "pushing hard" for the council to support Arbour's mission.

The United States and Britain have been quicker to blame the Serbs for

sovereign nations will make the appropriate decision."

Diplomats here said Clark and Naumann would remind Milosevic of his pledge in October to bring down tension in Kosovo and point out repeated violations of this promise.

The generals would also remind Milosevic that there was still the possibility of an international military intervention, even if the North Atlantic Treaty Organization for the moment has ruled out such action.

Monday, Milosevic had refused to meet Clark and Naumann. He also refused to allow prosecutors from the international war crimes tribunal on former Yugoslavia into Kosovo.

"It is a very serious situation. The plans made in October (for NATO military intervention) are very much alive, most of the forces are poised and ready should they be called on today. The others are only a few houses away," he said.

Clark warned Milosevic that he "should be under no illusion."

"NATO is very serious about its commitment in this case and at the appropriate time I am confident that the leaders of NATO

will Jovanovic Monday, Vollebaek strongly urged Belgrade to reconsider the expulsion decision. "But so far, I have seen no willingness to do so on their part," Vollebaek said.

Vollebaek said he had been discussing the issue with the foreign ministers of the United States, Russia and Germany. He is to meet in Vienna Wednesday with the other members of the OSCE troika of past, present and future chairmen. Poland's Bronislaw Geremek and Austria's Wolfgang Schuessel.

The OSCE spokeswoman said a lot depends on diplomatic efforts over the next day or two to persuade Belgrade to reverse its decision.

The United Nations, United States and Russia have led international calls on Belgrade to review its decision.

Asked what would happen if Walker is compelled to leave, she told AFP: "He has several deputies. Of course it doesn't function as well. They need a head. But it will function and it will continue to do its work."

As to whether a new head could be named to replace Walker, she added: "That's speculation. We're going to stick with the head of mission that we've appointed."

Bleak holiday for Jakarta's homeless and army

JAKARTA (R) — Most Indonesians celebrated the end of the Muslim month of fasting at home with family Tuesday, but for the capital's beggars and armed forces it was another day on the streets under the drenching tropical rain.

"I can't return to my village because I don't have any money," said Desmina, 40, who begs in the elite suburb of Menteng.

"I feel pained and bitter because I left behind eight children and many grandchildren... it hurts to see other people celebrating the holidays with their family."

Eid al-Fitr celebrates the end of Ramadan and comes with Indonesia in the grip of its worse economic crisis in 30 years, millions of people now in abject poverty.

Desmina, who worked as a labourer on a farm, left her village for Jakarta a year ago

with one daughter and two nieces when food at home became scarce.

She manages to get between 3,000 (35 U.S. cents) and 5,000 rupiah (58 cents) a day begging and pays 50,000 rupiah a month in rent for a small room. "Even with what we collect, we don't have enough to eat," she said.

Soldiers were also out on the streets to maintain security in the city which was the scene of massive student demonstrations and sporadic unrest for the greater part of 1998. At least a dozen students were killed in anti-government protests nationwide.

Instead of students, the soldiers were faced with rain and boredom Tuesday as they took what little shelter they could.

"We see the students as people, not as an enemy," he said.

"But yes, sometimes they are hard work." As for the students, who halted their protest last month to observe Ramadan, they have vowed to return to the streets after the holiday.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Zambian leader challenged to refute UNITA arms charge

LUSAKA (AFP) — Former Zambian leader Kenneth Kaunda has challenged the incumbent President Frederick Chiluba to refute charges that he has helped to arm UNITA rebels in Angola, press reports said Tuesday. "There is no smoke without fire, let them deny it convincingly and effectively because Angola keeps coming back with the same accusations," the Independent Post newspaper quoted Kaunda as saying. Angola has twice accused Zambia of facilitating the shipment of arms to the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Fresh allegations were made at the weekend during a meeting of foreign and defence ministers from several African states trying to map out a peaceful solution to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Kaunda said the fact that Zambia has been accused twice raised lots of questions which Chiluba had failed to address adequately. Zambia has on several occasions denied any involvement in the alleged shipment of arms to UNITA and has been cleared by the U.N. and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

Cubans reported aiding embattled Angola government

LISBON (R) — Cuba has sent advisers to Angola, where it once had thousands of troops, to help the former Marxist government of President Jose Eduardo dos Santos in its fight against UNITA rebels. A Portuguese newspaper reported Tuesday, Diario de Noticias said that up to 200 advisers, including some senior military officials, were believed to be in Luanda. It gave no source for its report and did not say when the advisers had arrived. Some Cuban officials were also reported to be in the central highland town of Malanje, which has been under attack for weeks by UNITA troops, the newspaper said. Cuba backed dos Santos' Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) for some 15 years during the first Angolan civil war, which started before the country's independence from Portugal in 1975. A first peace treaty between the MPLA and UNITA, once backed by the United States and South Africa, broke down after rebel chief Jonas Savimbi refused to accept the results of 1992 elections in which dos Santos was elected president. Another United Nations-brokered truce was achieved in 1994, but that collapsed shortly before Christmas last year, plunging the oil and diamond-rich country back into civil war.

Indian minister promises safety for foreign tourists

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Indian Tourism Minister Madan Lal Khurana pledged Tuesday to act on growing complaints from foreign tourists that they are being harassed, cheated and even poisoned. "We have to stop this harassment of tourists as it brings a very bad name to the country," Khurana told reporters. The minister said tourism officials would be soon posted at the Indira Gandhi international airport in New Delhi to escort tourists to taxis, direct them to hotels and "extend all help they require." The move follows a spate of reports of airport touts luring unsuspecting tourists to shady hotels and then robbing them. A 20-year-old Japanese tourist who went missing near the airport last month was later found brutally murdered — his body cut into eight pieces. Unofficial guides have also reportedly cheated tourists in the Taj Mahal town of Agra, 200 kilometres south of here, by lacing their food with mild poison and then taking a cut of the doctor's treatment fee. Khurana said many small guest houses in the Indian capital had also become "terrorist hideouts and criminal havens." India granted 2.3 million tourist visas in 1997, compared to 5.2 million issued by tiny Singapore, and the number reportedly fell further last year.

France's giant Carnac site of standing stones partially reopened

PARIS (AFP) — Visitors are to be readmitted part of the year inside the giant Carnac site of 3,800 standing stones in western Brittany, which was fenced off to the public in 1991 to avoid damage to the ancient menhirs. The culture ministry has announced after a report on the state of the site that visitors will be authorised to roam about the site again but only during the winter months, outside the tourist season. Currently harriers have been thrown up around the 6,000-year-old menhirs to avoid further soil erosion and damage to vegetation that threatened to unsettle the standing stones. The damage was said to have been caused by 800,000 annual visitors trampling France's Stonehenge. After closing off close access to the menhirs, French authorities launched a bid to replant and revive the vegetation and had planned to build off-the-ground walkways while introducing a fee in 2001-2002 for access to Carnac. Local residents however have opposed the idea of what they describe as a "Menhirland", demanding continued free access to the standing stones. The ministry said that the walkways will be built along with observation sites, with access continuing to be free. Visits may be limited during the peak summer tourist season depending on the state of the soil. Archaeological diggings will be started to glean further knowledge on the dating of the stones and on the civilisation that erected them. France may also ask UNESCO to add the site to the World Heritage list.

21 killed in tornado in South Africa

MOUNT AYLIFF, South Africa (AFP) — At least 21 people were killed when a tornado hit the rural areas around the small town of Mount Ayliff in South Africa's Eastern Cape province, police told AFP Tuesday. "We have 21 people in the mortuary," station commander Nxibe Zweladunga told AFP. He said about 225 people had been admitted to the Mount Ayliff hospital after the tornado hit on Monday afternoon. Other injured people had been transferred to hospitals in the neighbouring KwaZulu-Natal province. The SAFA news agency reported that the injured included about 100 children who were critically hurt. Zweladunga said all the dead had come from the areas surrounding the town, where traditional thatched rondavels (round houses) made of mud had collapsed in the torrential rain and wind. "The houses collapsed while people were inside and they were injured and some died," he said. Rescue workers were looking for bodies in the area for more dead and injured. In December, a tornado ploughed through Umthata, about 100 kilometres south of Mount Ayliff, killing 18 people and injuring 162.



Top British model Kate Moss, for French fashion house Chanel, designed by German designer Karl Lagerfeld presents this grey skirt and cardigan as part of her Spring-Summer 1999 Haute Couture fashion collection (Reuters photo).



OSCE urges Belgrade to reverse Kosovo chief expulsion



Cambodian opposition leader Sam Rainsy speaks to journalists on his arrival at Phnom Penh International Airport, Phnom Penh. In a rare show of unity across Cambodia's political divide, Sam Rainsy backed proposals by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen for a wide reaching Khmer Rouge trial (AFP photo)

'China to free dissident journalist'

HONG KONG (R) — China might soon release a prominent Chinese dissident jailed in 1993 for her journalism, a Hong Kong rights group said Tuesday.

Gao Yu, who in early January left the Beijing prison where she had been kept, had been transferred to a young criminals' education camp near her home in the capital, the Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said.

"This paves the way for Gao's release," the centre said.

Gao, a 55-year-old journalist, was sentenced to six years in jail in 1993 for "disclosing state secrets" after writing a series of articles on structural reform in China for Hong Kong's Mirror Monthly magazine. The sentence ends this October.

The information centre said China's authorities had always seen the release of Gao, who has serious heart disease, as a possible political bargaining chip in the country's dealings with the West.

It added that the dissident was still being held because she insisted on pleading not guilty.

The information centre also said that veteran dissident Xu Wenli, who had previously been reported to have been sent to a harsh labour camp outside Beijing, had in fact been in the Beijing prison on Jan. 13.

Xu, 55, one of three founders of a banned opposition party, was jailed last month for 13 years. Two other founders of the Chinese Democratic Party, Wang Yinei and Qin Yongmin, were also

sentenced to 11 years and 12 years in jail respectively.

In the northwestern province of Gansu, dissidents Yue Tianxiang and Guo Xinmin, who founded "China Workers Rights" to help laid-off workers and monitor corruption at state-owned factories, were being held on charges of "endangering state safety", the Hong Kong rights group said.

Yue, 42, and Guo, 40, were detained on Jan. 10. Police declined to disclose where the two were being held.

Dannii Minogue records her vote on Australian republic

SYDNEY (AFP) — Pin-up girl and pop star Dannii Minogue lives in Britain for most of the year but she thinks it's time Australia ditched the queen and became a republic.

"It's time we reaped the rewards of our unique identity" and becoming a republic is a step in the right direction, she told reporters Tuesday during a promotional stop in Sydney.

"I can't see why we

shouldn't... I have ties to England, my mum was born there and therefore I'm able to get a visa to live and work there as long as I want."

"But I think it's very frustrating for an Australian to grow up looking at the queen on every note and every coin and then to be told you can only come to live and work in the country for a year."

Australians experience exactly what Americans and other

foreigners experienced when they applied for a visa to live in Britain.

"So why are we bowing down to the queen and living by her rules when you don't get anything extra for it anyway?" she said. "Yeah, let's be ourselves, let's be unique, let's stand up."

Minogue, the sister of pint-sized pop diva Kylie Minogue, was in Sydney to promote her new single, "Everlasting Night". In addition to

her music career, the younger Minogue has a thriving career as a pin-up — her calendar is among the best-selling in Australia.

"I can notice that and he more objective because I live outside of Australia and I'm travelling in and out," she said. "It's hard for people who live here to see that it is moving and changing. Stuff like that — music, fashion, clothes, everything is building," she said.



The 'Marree Man', a four-kilometre-tall image of a naked Aboriginal man mysteriously carved into the outback is shown in this undated satellite image. The massive figure was secretly etched last year into red soil near Marree, 700 kilometres north of Adelaide and police have been unable to discover who was responsible. The self-proclaimed creators of the world's largest artwork want to shed their anonymity and are promising a series of clues about its origins to be unearthed in the coming weeks at famed giant chalk drawings in England. The first answer was buried in a sealed container near the Cerne Giant, in Dorset, England, and an anonymous statement faxed to media January 18 said, "It relates to the question Who?" (Reuters photo)

Europe welcomes Cambodia push for Khmer Rouge justice

PHNOM PENH (R) — The European Union Tuesday welcomed an assurance from Cambodian premier Hun Sen that he would back the prosecution of Khmer Rouge leaders held responsible for mass slaughter during their 1970s rule.

The EU said the ambassadors of member states Britain, France and Germany made a formal approach to Hun Sen last week to make clear its position that "all senior Khmer Rouge leaders responsible for crimes should be held to answer."

"Prime Minister Hun Sen... emphasised that there was no one who wanted a trial more than himself and that 'it is our unavoidable duty to bring the Khmer Rouge leaders to justice,'" the EU said in a statement.

"The EU encouraged the... government to continue its efforts and its cooperation with the international community to achieve accountability for the crimes of the 1975 to 1979 period and to develop a mechanism for holding Khmer Rouge leaders responsible," the EU

said. The surrender of two top Khmer Rouge henchmen last month has thrown a spotlight on the sensitive question of whether leaders of the group responsible for the deaths of an estimated 1.7 million people during its 1975-1979 rule should be brought to justice.

Hun Sen, a one-time junior Khmer Rouge officer who broke away in 1977, initially gave Chea Simphavong and Nuon Chea a VIP welcome back to society and hinted their trial might not be in the interests of national reconciliation.

But after a chorus of indignation from human rights groups and pressure from some Western governments, he said he had always backed a trial for leaders of the notorious communist group.

Hun Sen and his then senior co-premier, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, asked the United Nations in June 1997 for help in setting up a tribunal for Khmer Rouge leaders responsible for the killings when they held power.

As a result, a team of U.N.-appointed jurists visited Cambodia in November to assess evidence and consider how legal proceedings might be undertaken. The team is due to present its proposals to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan next month.

A senior aide to Hun Sen said at the weekend that the premier is surveying public opinion on the issue of a trial for Khmer Rouge leaders but will leave the final decision to legal experts.

Om Yenting said that there were differing opinions about what period any tribunal should cover with some suggesting all crimes against humanity committed between 1970 and 1998 be investigated.

That could implicate the United States, China, Thailand and possibly others as well.

The United States launched a massive bombing campaign against Cambodia during the Vietnam war. Analysts argue the U.S. bombing fuelled the rise of the Khmer Rouge.

The Khmer Rouge were forced from power by a Vietnamese invasion in late 1978 and took refuge on the Thai border where Vietnam's then-enemies, Thailand and China, provided sanctuary and supplies for the Khmer Rouge war against Vietnam's army of occupation and the Hanoi-backed government.

Through the 1980s the Khmer Rouge dominated an opposition "coalition government" recognised by the United Nations and supported by non-communist Southeast Asia.

Political analysis said it was insisted on broadening the time-frame for a tribunal investigation, the whole process could founder due to foreign objections.

"The danger is it would just make it more difficult to arrange a tribunal," said a Western diplomat.

"If his objective is to bring the truth into the open he should go for a strictly time-limited process, in the course of which, all this (foreign involvement) would come out anyway."

China opposes inclusion of Taiwan in U.S.-Japan defence pact

BEIJING (AFP) — China said Tuesday it opposed the incorporation of Taiwan into a Japan-U.S. defence pact whether directly or indirectly because it constituted an infringement of Chinese sovereignty.

Foreign ministry spokesman Sun Yuxi told a bi-weekly news briefing the Taiwan issue was entirely an internal affair of China and "no one has the right to interfere in this issue."

China has taken offence to remarks made by Ichiro Ozawa, the leader of Japan's Liberal Party (LDP) which last week forged a coalition with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

Ozawa said last week Japan-U.S. defence cooperation guidelines, following emergencies in areas "surrounding Japan" should include Russia, China, Taiwan and the Korean peninsula.

The LDP has refused to specify geographical areas for the military cooperation sticking to the "areas surrounding Japan" phrase

apparently in fear of angering China, which sees Taiwan as a renegade province.

The guidelines allow greater Japanese support for U.S. forces during crises. Enacting legislation for the U.S.-Japan guidelines is scheduled to be passed in a parliamentary session which opened in Tokyo Tuesday.

Ozawa is generally in favour of a stronger overseas defence role for Japan.

Sun said Japan-U.S. security cooperation was bilateral cooperation against the special headache of the cold war era.

"This arrangement should be strictly limited to its bilateral scope. If after the cold war ended this arrangement went beyond its bilateral scope, it will certainly trigger worries of neighbouring countries."

he said.

The direct or indirect incorporation of Taiwan in the Japan-U.S. Defence Cooperation Guideline constitutes an infringement on China's sovereignty and will be firmly opposed by

the Chinese government and people," he said.

Sun said the Japanese government had clarified Ozawa's remarks through diplomatic channels.

The official China Daily in an editorial Tuesday said the "unilateral inclusion of a territory of another country with independent sovereignty under any form of Japanese influence constitutes an extreme violation of international law."

The editorial said "despite every Japanese effort to conceal their true motivation, slips of tongue, as they are usually referred to, by Japanese politicians reveal just what is in their minds."

It said the Japanese government's clarification aimed at assuring China the areas surrounding Japan" was not a specific geographical concept but based on regional developments was too weak to stand scrutiny.

"Compared to previous awkwardly phrased deceptive words, Ozawa spilled the beans over Japan's intentions in the region," it said.

4 nations open peace talks on divided Korea

GENEVA (AP) — North and South Korea, China and the United States began talks here Tuesday aimed at forging a permanent peace treaty for the divided Korean peninsula, half a century after the Korean war ended in an uneasy truce.

North Korean deputy foreign minister Kim Kyung-Gwan, Pyongyang's chief negotiator, welcomed the delegates to the Geneva conference centre shortly after 10:00 a.m. (0900 GMT).

Communist North Korea, chairing the negotiations for the first time, a fact which observers say could prompt Pyongyang into making uncharacteristic concessions.

The 1950-53 Korean war ended with a truce, but a permanent peace treaty was never signed, leaving the North and South technically still at war.

The talks come amid mounting tension in the region over Pyongyang's nuclear and missile capabilities.

Diplomatic sources here said the talks — the fourth round — were mainly aimed at establishing the make-up and agenda of two sub-committees which the sides agreed to set up at their last meeting in October.

One sub-committee will look at establishing peace on the Korean peninsula, while the other will focus on ways of reducing tension on the world's last cold war frontier.

Li Gun, deputy head of the North Korean delegation, said Monday the sub-committees would meet Wednesday and Thursday, but declined to give details.

Washington and Beijing take part as the respective wartime allies of South and North Korea and as the nations which help maintain the tense truce.

The talks process began in December 1997, but the first two meetings broke up in acrimony after Pyongyang demanded the 37,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea be withdrawn.

Analysts say North Korea's first spell in the chair means Pyongyang is unlikely to allow this round of talks to collapse or end without at least nominal progress.

Diplomatic sources said North Korea had chaired Monday's preparatory talks in a "constructive" way.

Yeltsin feeling better, but doctors plan more tests

MOSCOW (AP) — A hospitalised Boris Yeltsin was feeling better Tuesday, but doctors wanted to conduct more tests to determine whether he will need surgery to repair his bleeding ulcer.

Sergei Mironov, the president's chief doctor, said Yeltsin wasn't expected to leave the hospital for two to three weeks, and won't be allowed to travel for up to three months, the ITAR-TASS news agency reported.

Yeltsin, who was hospitalised Sunday, had planned to travel to France on Jan. 28, his first trip abroad since he cut short a visit to Central Asia in October, also because of illness.

Yeltsin's press service said the trip to France had not been cancelled yet. Yeltsin and French President Jacques Chirac spoke by phone Tuesday. The Kremlin said, but no details were immediately available.

Tuesday morning, doctors met to discuss Yeltsin's condition and

give him medication and injections to prevent the ulcer from spreading, the Interfax news agency said.

The president has become more active, he is looking through documents supplied by the administration and also reading newspapers, presidential spokesman Dmitry Yakushev told Interfax.

The president was to undergo tests Wednesday and doctors will determine whether he needs surgery. Mirnov said, Ulcers can usually be treated with medicine, though surgery is required in some cases.

Yeltsin's doctors had indicated Monday that the president would just receive medicine, but later they said a final decision on surgery would be made Wednesday, the ITAR-TASS news agency reported.

Yeltsin's latest trip to the hospital is his fifth since he won reelection in 1996. He has not set foot in his Kremlin office this year.

Opposition politicians are again calling for

Yeltsin's ouster, saying he is incapable of running the government. He turned over most responsibility for running the country to Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov months ago.

Mironov and other doctors played down the seriousness of Yeltsin's latest illness.

"I do not believe that it is a very complicated case," said Michael DeBakey, the American heart surgeon who observed Yeltsin's 1996 bypass surgery according to ITAR-TASS.

Despite continued pressure from Russia's Communist-dominated lower house of parliament, Mirnov said the public was unlikely to get a detailed report on Yeltsin's health. Lawmakers tried to pass a resolution requiring a health report this fall, but the motion failed.

The issue "cannot be considered a purely medical one," Mironov said, according to ITAR-TASS. "The president is a human being who has the right to seek the protection of his privacy rights."

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Home again

BEFORE ALL else, having descended from his plane upon his emotional return to Jordan yesterday, His Majesty King Hussein turned to face Mecca and prayed.

That image alone spoke volumes about King Hussein's enormous faith — the very same faith that has helped him to bear the weight of many tribulations, not least of which was his recent and arduous personal struggle against cancer. With the forbearance we have come to depend on, and with the gallantry that has distinguished him among world leaders, King Hussein stood to greet each and every well-wisher gathered to welcome him home along with the members of his family.

Moments before touching down at Marka Airport, the King, at the throttle of his G-4 jet, made a salutary flyover the capital of his beloved Jordan. As his family watched the plane approach, tears welled up in their eyes — their fullness of heart was shared by everyone.

His Majesty has returned to his Kingdom, where he has had an impact on every sphere in the building of a small, vulnerable and natural resource-lacking country into a modern, democratic and pluralistic state that stands as a model in the region.

Steeling himself against an icy rain, King Hussein rode through the streets of Amman waving to the crowds through the sunroof of his car, while Her Majesty Queen Noor, ever at his side through the past six months, lent a gentle hand of support. To brave such weather to be close to his people, so many of whom he knows by name, is characteristic of His Majesty. The euphoria of Jordanians cheering in the streets, waving flags from windows and balconies, and ululating from rooftops is a show of genuine spontaneity seldom, if ever, accorded to other world leaders. He is truly loved by his people and by all who have had the honour to work for him, and he is held with utmost regard by the international community.

Al Hussein is back, and for that we all say prayers of thanks. His return to the entire Jordanian family should bring us all closer together — that has always been his example.

A case of double standards

THERE IS a sense of déjà vu about the Kosovo conflict especially after the massacre of 45 ethnic Albanians in Racak by Serb forces in the past few days. The cold-blooded killing of Albanian civilians, including women and a 12-year-old child, has shocked the international community and moved William Walker, the head of the International Truce monitoring team operating in Kosovo, to describe the wanton killings and mutilations as, prima facie, a crime against humanity necessitating an inquiry by the UN War Crimes Tribunal.

But what ensued were a series of condemnations by various leaders including U.S. President Bill Clinton, the UN Security Council and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) coupled with threats by NATO to launch air strikes against Serbian forces should Belgrade continue to violate the ceasefire brokered last October between Serb President Slobodan Milosevic and U.S. envoy Richard Holbrooke. But Milosevic knows very well from past experience that NATO will not act until it is too late and only after the Serbs attain their military and political objectives. The case in point is of course Bosnia where U.N. and NATO threats against Serbian atrocities and ethnic cleansing did not go into effect until it was too late. Hundreds of thousands of Bosnian Muslims were slaughtered in the process. A dark point in history occurred when the U.N.-declared safe haven, Srebrenica, was allowed to be overrun and its people murdered in cold blood by the thousands before the very eyes of the former U.N. Secretary General Boutros Ghali and NATO forces. It was only after the defiant Serb forces attained their main goals that NATO began to strike back at the Serbian forces.

The same scenario appears to take hold once again in Kosovo where Milosevic has successfully called the bluff of both NATO and the Security Council. Now Belgrade has arrogantly called for the removal of William Walker for daring to speak out on the Racak massacre and has refused entry to the chief prosecutor of the UN War Crimes Tribunal.

When Iraq allegedly refused to cooperate fully with UNSCOM, the reply of Washington and London was swift and forceful. When Belgrade violates all agreements with the U.N., massacres thousands of innocent civilians and refuses full cooperation with the OSCE Kosovo verification mission, nothing happens. Is this then not a case of double standards? The Serb defiance continues to take a heavy toll on Albanian lives while NATO and the U.N. continue to make hollow threats exactly as they did in the past in Bosnia. The real culprit in the case of Kosovo as was also in the case of Bosnia and Iraq is the silent international community.

Washington Watch

Iraq and the people

Dr. James J. Zogby

THE BEHAVIOUR of the Iraqi leadership during the past week placed in sharp focus the problem that this regime has created for the broader Arab World.

For several years now the suffering of Iraq's people has been a central concern in Arab public opinion. The statistics on infant mortality and the malnutrition rates are staggering and deeply disturbing to the Arab World that knew Iraq in its better days.

Anguish at this cruel fate that has befallen the people of Iraq has turned into anger at the United States and not merely because of its leadership role in maintaining the comprehensive sanctions regime that has crippled Iraq's economy. It is the firm Arab belief that the United States practices a double standard in its application of international law, in its expression of compassion, and in its administration of justice and use of force.

Some Arab writers have suggested that the Iraqi leadership has been emboldened to challenge the United States and spew forth harsh rhetoric against Arab governments friendly to the United States, because they have confused Arab public opinion's concern for Iraq's people with support for their regime. While this may account for part of the calculations of the Iraqi

government, the critical matter of the U.S. double standard cannot be ignored.

There is Arab anger at the United States. There is a sense of frustration and betrayal. While the United States is acknowledged by several key Arab states as the world superpower that plays a necessary role in protecting regional security, the United States' failure to deal equitably with Arab needs has, at times, proved politically costly to its Arab allies. And it is against this background that the Iraqi leadership plays its provocative game of manipulating public anger.

Former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker understood this fact all too well. In 1990, shortly after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Baker attempted to analyse the reaction of some segments of Arab society to this cruel act. Baker suggested that the Iraqi leader portrayed himself as the "champion of the downtrodden" the one who would challenge the powers that be in the name of those who are oppressed. Both characterisations are, of course, misguided, since the Iraqi regime is, itself, oppressive. But, given the reality of Arab alienation from the West, the regime in Baghdad has been cruelly able to manipulate two popular themes — public support for the suffering of its own people and this profound sense of

Arab alienation — into a political weapon that it has used against its enemies in times of stress.

The Iraqi regime has continually been advised that its needs would be best served by complying with international inspections and then complaining about whatever problems it has with these inspections.

Instead it has chosen an alternative path and that is to engage in a long drawn out and irksome "cat and mouse" game with the inspection regime and then play confrontational politics with those whose support the regime should be seeking to win.

Throughout this long saga it is the Iraqi people who have been the victims and it is the emotions and passions of Arab public opinion that have been played upon and worn down to the bone.

In the current situation, Arab states that are allied with the United States are posed with a disturbing dilemma. On one hand they are deeply troubled by the reckless behaviour of the regime in Iraq and on the other hand they are concerned with the failure of the United States to develop a coherent and consistent policy toward not only Iraq but also the Middle East as a whole. This is especially troublesome because they recognise and value the role that the United States could play in the region.

And so it is in this context that several Arab states have begun an effort to formulate an alternative approach to dealing with the Iraq problem. They are guided by a few central objectives. They want to address and alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people. They do not want to legitimise the regime in power or reward its behaviour. But cognisant of the potent political impact that the current situation is having on their public opinion, they want to separate out to the extent that it is possible, policy directed at the regime in Iraq from the policy they will formulate to meet the needs of the people of the country.

The Arabs are not alone in this effort to arrive at such a new formula to deal with Iraq. There are currently before the United Nations at least three other somewhat similar proposals.

I have just returned from a meeting with the U.N. secretary general in New York. I led a small group of Arab Americans to a discussion with Mr. Annan about a number of Middle East problems (e.g., the issue of Palestinian statehood, the danger of an escalation of Israeli attacks on Lebanon and the matter of the U.S. bombing of a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan). But what occupied most of our discussion was the especially vexing problem

of Iraq.

While the secretary general is a true diplomat, what comes through clearly is his disappointment at the persistence of this disturbing situation. So much has been invested in the secretary general's role.

But he can only do what member states allow him the latitude to do. He has vision and moral authority, but he can neither impose his will nor can he change behaviour.

The secretary general informed us of the outlines of the French, Russian and U.S. proposals to deal with the Iraqi situation. The details of an Arab position are still being formed. It appears that while there are some substantial differences in all of these various proposals, there are some points of agreement as well.

He assumed that it would require a few more weeks of discussion and distillation before these various approaches could be shaped into a new international consensus. It will in the end require "creativity, compromise and flexibility" from all parties for such a new approach to form. But while we wait to see if such a consensus can be found and if the Iraqi government will accept a new approach, it is the Iraqi people who will continue to suffer and be exploited — still waiting for an end to their long nightmare.

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The EU and the Arab states

By Pascal B. Karmy

THE INTRODUCTION of the euro in Europe has ushered in a new era not only in Europe, but also in the world at large. It is an unprecedented event in history for independent states to have one currency. The euro now constitutes one of three very strong economic units in the world, competing with the United States dollar and the Japanese yen. It is indeed an unprecedented event in view of the fact that the European states have undergone two great wars this century in which millions of Europeans were killed, in addition to untold others: the hundred years war, the thirty years war, the seven years war and the Napoleonic wars. The European states comprising different races and ethnic origins and using various currencies, have in addition to the conversion to one euro currency, pulled down boundaries so that a European can freely travel from one corner of Europe to another without meeting any official hindrance or impediment.

However, there is at present a nucleus to constitute a federation or a confederation inasmuch as there are the Arab Postal Union, the Arab Union for Telecommunications, the Arab Organisation for Combating Crime, the Arab Organisation for Administrative Sciences, the Arab Monetary Fund and the Arab Satellite Communication.

This is nonsense. There is no reason to believe that the well-educated and (relatively) prosperous Albanians of an independent Kosovo would fit themselves to the anarchic and desolate nation of Albania — and if they did, so what? Macedonia (which is ethnically 25 per cent Albanian) might experience a little instability; Greece (which is two per cent Albanian) would experience ooze.

On one hand, low-level risks of "destabilisation." On the other, ongoing massacres. So why, finally, does NATO go on making hollow threats that can only undermine its own credibility, while shirking the actions that would put a stop to the murder?

If we compare the European Union with the condition of the Arab states there is much scope for regret and sadness. The Arab states are in disarray and do not speak with one voice, despite the fact that they have many things in common namely language, religion, culture, a shared history and the struggle against imperialism.

As a new world order has dawned upon the world with one sole military power (the U.S.), which tries to affect the destinies of peoples, it therefore behoves the Arab states to coalesce so as to parity external threats and aggressions upon the Arab peoples and to enable them to compel Israel to withdraw from the Arab occupied territories.

The writer was an independent London-based journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries.

the mighty and treacherous the weak and the pusillanimous. It is a high time to remove the boundaries facing Arab citizens travelling from one state to another. In regard we should emulate the European Union. An Arab citizen travelling from one Arab state to another has to submit to various checks and to perform all kinds of formalities which only serve to discourage him... from embarking on such a voyage.

The Arab states face many challenges and dangers which threaten their sovereignty and their national security and stability. It is therefore incumbent upon them to sincerely and diligently work for political and economic unity to enable their voice to be listened to and reckoned with in the world which respects but the powerful. It is futile for the Arabs to reminisce about their glorious past without any efforts being exerted for the unification of their states in a federation or at least a confederation.

However, there is at present a nucleus to constitute a federation or a confederation inasmuch as there are the Arab Postal Union, the Arab Union for Telecommunications, the Arab Organisation for Combating Crime, the Arab Organisation for Administrative Sciences, the Arab Monetary Fund and the Arab Satellite Communication.

There is also the Arab League which regrettably has failed to achieve Arab unity, and has not been able to cope with the external threats to the Arab states. But it is incumbent upon the Arab states to enhance the power and prestige of the Arab League instead of simply absolving themselves of failures in the world political arena and throwing these upon the league, forgetting their innate parochial conflicts.

It is necessary to energise the league's activities so that it will stand as the symbol of Arab will and determination and unity in the face of the so-called new world order in which the weak will be subjugated if not annihilated. Let us hope that the Arab states will follow in the steps of the European Union and emulating it to form a federation or a confederation with currency and no borders. They will thus achieve the ambitions and aspirations of the Arab peoples in strength, progress and prosperity.

The writer was an independent London-based journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries.

Secrets of a paper tiger

By Gwynne Dyer

"THE INTERNATIONAL community is not prepared to accept the brutal persecution and murder of civilians," said German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer on Sunday — and not one of the assembled journalists laughed out loud. Journalists can be quite polite.

"The (Serbian) police told us to run," said one of the few survivors of the massacre in the Kosovo village of Racak that Fischer was deplored. "As soon as we started to run, they started to shoot us." But most didn't even get to run.

When William Walker, the American head of the international Kosovo Verification Mission, saw the bodies of 45 ethnic Albanian victims in Racak on Saturday, he was overwhelmed: "I don't have the words to express my revulsion at this unspeakable atrocity: to see bodies like this, with their faces blown away by what was obviously (weapons) held close to their heads."

Walker said plainly that the Serbs were to blame — so Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic ordered him to leave the country within 48 hours. Milosevic also ordered the border closed to Chief War Crimes Prosecutor Louise Arbour of the International Criminal Tribunal, who tried to enter Kosovo to investigate the slaughter. The Yugoslav army shot up the deserted village again and moved 40 bodies to Pristina, the capital of Kosovo province, presumably to destroy the evidence. And NATO, which threatened air strikes in late September to make Milosevic stop the previous round of massacres in Kosovo, tried to look really stern and impatient.

But for all its bunting and puffing, NATO is unlikely to use its aircraft against the Serbian forces in Kosovo, let alone against Belgrade. And it is certainly not going to commit its own troops to Kosovo to stop the killing.

Why not? NATO did finally use its aircraft against the Serbs in Bosnia, after all, and thereby ended three years of genocide. Why will it not at least do the same service for Kosovo?

NATO has accepted the independence of Slovenia, of Croatia, of Bosnia, of

Macedonia, of all the former republics of federal Yugoslavia except Serbia itself and tiny Montenegro. It has tacitly backed the Croats, and used force to support the legal government of Bosnia in its resistance to Serbian attacks. But Kosovo (it says here) is different.

Fully 90 per cent of Kosovo's two million inhabitants are Albanian-speaking Muslims, and less than 10 per cent are Serbian. Who Yugoslavia really was a federal state where Serbs were merely the largest single group, not the rulers, under the Communist dictator Josip Tito, Kosovo's Albanians ran their own affairs, and were mostly loyal to the ideal of a multi-national Yugoslavia.

But Kosovo was never formally a "republic" like the others. In deference to the sensibilities of Serbs, who regard the area as the mystical cradle of their nation, Kosovo legally remained an "autonomous province" of Serbia. And that was fine too, so long as the rights (weapons) held close to their heads.

Even Tito's successors kept the deal — until Slobodan Milosevic, who began his climb to absolute power in Serbia in 1989 by abolishing Kosovo's autonomy and turning it into a place run by and for the tiny Serb minority. The Kosovars (as the Muslim majority call themselves) were outraged, but mouthed a purely non-violent resistance to Serbian tyranny for nine years.

Being non-violent, they were therefore ignored by the outside powers that were busy fighting the fires that Milosevic started in Croatia, Bosnia etc. Inevitably, some frustrated Kosovars eventually turned to military resistance. The response of Milosevic's regime was mass terror and massacre, which drove practically all of the majority into the arms of the rebels.

The Serbs killed at least 2,000 civilians and made a quarter of the population homeless last August and September before NATO threats forced them to accept a cease-fire. Now, with an unusually mild winter making military operations possible, the killing in Kosovo has started again. So why won't NATO stop it?

The public answer is that it cannot permit the independence of Kosovo no

matter how badly Serbia behaves because the "province" is legally a part of Serbia. But that is mere sophistry: Nobody in NATO really fears that Kosovo's secession from Serbia would be used as a precedent by Basque nationalists in Spain or Quebec separatists in Canada.

The private answer is different. It is that an independent Kosovo would unite with Albania to form a large, mostly Muslim country — and that, in turn, would destabilise Montenegro and Greece by attracting the Albanian minorities in those countries.

This is nonsense. There is no reason to believe that the well-educated and (relatively) prosperous Albanians of an independent Kosovo would fit themselves to the anarchic and desolute nation of Albania — and if they did, so what? Macedonia (which is ethnically 25 per cent Albanian) might experience a little instability; Greece (which is two per cent Albanian) would experience ooze.

On one hand, low-level risks of "destabilisation." On the other, ongoing massacres. So why, finally, does NATO go on making hollow threats that can only undermine its own credibility, while shirking the actions that would put a stop to the murder?

I'll let you in on the secret. It's because it's afraid of casualties. Air power is all right for fireworks displays, but you need to commit ground troops if you're going to do something complex like shepherding Kosovo to independence.

Ground troops, in the Kosovo situation, mean casualties. The largest military organisation on the planet is a complete paper tiger, because its governments dare not face the domestic political repercussions of even a dozen dead soldiers. So Kosovo's agony must continue until some tens of thousands more people have been killed, and the remaining villages have been burned to the ground, and the Serbs finally give up and go home.

The writer is an independent London-based journalist whose articles are published in

'Eid Al Fitr joyless for prisoners' children

By Nidal Al Mughrabi

Reuters

PALESTINIAN SCHOOLGIRL Nihad Zaqout moved U.S. President Bill Clinton to tears last month when she told him of the plight of her father in an Israeli jail.

But 11-year-old Zaqout says she has hope after the president failed to win her father's freedom in time for this week's festival of 'Eid Al Fitr.

Zaqout said she lay awake at night waiting for her father to knock at the door of their home in the Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. He never came.

"The American president has broken his promise to secure the release of my father before 'Eid Al Fitr," she told Reuters on Sunday, the eve of the festival marking the end of the

fasting month of Ramadan.

During a ground-breaking visit to the Gaza Strip on December 14, Clinton told Zaqout and three other Palestinian schoolgirls that he would take up their case with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Witnesses said the four weeping girls brought tears to the eyes of the U.S. leader.

Zaqout said her father Mohammed is serving a life sentence for stabbing and wounding Israelis in the Israeli city of Tel Aviv in 1988. Israel refuses to free Muslim militants or any prisoners it says have blood on their hands.

"I will tell my father to put no hope in anyone but God, no Clinton and nobody else will help us to free our relatives," Zaqout said when asked what she was going to tell her

father during a prison visit next week.

Netanyahu freed 250 prisoners in November — the first of 750 prisoners due to be released in three batches under a Clinton-mediated peace deal Netanyahu signed with Palestinian Yasser Arafat in the White House in October.

Israel's inclusion of 150 common criminals upset Palestinians, who had expected all 250 to be prisoners held for nationalistic offenses.

While marking 'Eid Al Fitr in Gaza on Monday, Arafat said: "As for my brothers the prisoners, I tell them, 'Patience, and God willing, soon we will be together and pray together in Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.'" Israelis were just as disappointed in Clinton as Zaqout was — but for another reason.

Israeli officials voiced shock when Clinton, on his December visit, said he was moved to tears both by children of the prisoners and of Israelis killed by Palestinians. Israelis said Clinton wrongly equated the murderers with the murdered.

Other Gaza children of Palestinians in Israeli and Palestinian jails had little joy at the start of 'Eid Al-Fitr.

"My mother bought new clothes for me but I will not be happy with them because I need my father back in the house," said Zaqout's 11-year-old brother Jihad.

Fatima Al-Khawaja, 70, whose son Yasser, an Islamic Jihad activist, is serving a life sentence in an Israeli jail for stabbing and wounding five soldiers in Gaza City in 1987, said she once hoped he would be freed as

a result of peace deals with Israel.

"We lost faith in Arabs and in Jews to obtain the release of our sons," she said. "Our 'Eid is delayed until Yasser is released." The release of prisoners from Israel's jails is important to Arafat in his efforts to gain the support of the Palestinians for peace deals with Israel. Palestinian officials say about 2,400 prisoners are still held by Israel.

Sufian Abu Zayda, a negotiator on the issue of prisoners, predicted an explosion in Palestinian areas if the prisoner issue is not solved fairly and soon.

"You cannot imagine how bad jailed fathers feel for not being with their families at this day," said Abu Zayda, who served 12 years in Israeli jails between 1981 and 1993. Prospects for advancement on the

peace front have dimmed as Israel enters a four-month election campaign.

Last Wednesday Palestinian lawmakers gave the Palestinian Authority two weeks to free 450 political prisoners, mostly from the Islamic militant group Hamas, or face the threat of a no-confidence vote.

"It is silly to ask Israel to release our prisoners if those released will be re-arrested by our own government," said a relative of a detainee in a Palestinian Authority jail, who asked not to be identified.

At the weekend, Palestinian police released 54 jailed prisoners for the festival, including members of Hamas and other opposition groups. Israel denounced the move as another violation of agreements.

Roadside slaughter provokes anger at gilded youth

By Suzanne Goldenberg

IN A CITY where wealth and the right connections will fix most anything, the three young men in the black BMW would not have been unduly concerned about driving drunk and at high speed through the New Delhi night.

Then the driver, Sanjeev Nanda, grandson of a former Indian naval chief and son of a businessman, lost control, ploughing into roadside cluster of men. Five people, including three policemen, were killed. A sixth died at the weekend, and a seventh man is critically ill in hospital. But it is the trio's supreme callousness after the tragedy that has horrified the capital, and set off a raging debate about the moral decline of India's gilded youth and the ugly face of an elite that believes it is above the law.

According to the police

A tycoon warning for the world from Hong Kong

By Stephen Vines

IF ONLY governments were run by successful businessmen, wouldn't that make them work far better? It's an interesting idea but one which could be quickly dispelled by a trip to Hong Kong which nowadays is run by a former shipping tycoon.

Those wishing to make the trip seated in the first-class compartment of an airline had better wait until the end of the week because from today many of the seats will be taken up by a gaggle of tycoons travelling at the Hong Kong taxpayer's expense to the first meeting of the chief executive's council of advisers (note that business-minded Hong Kong calls its head of government the chief executive).

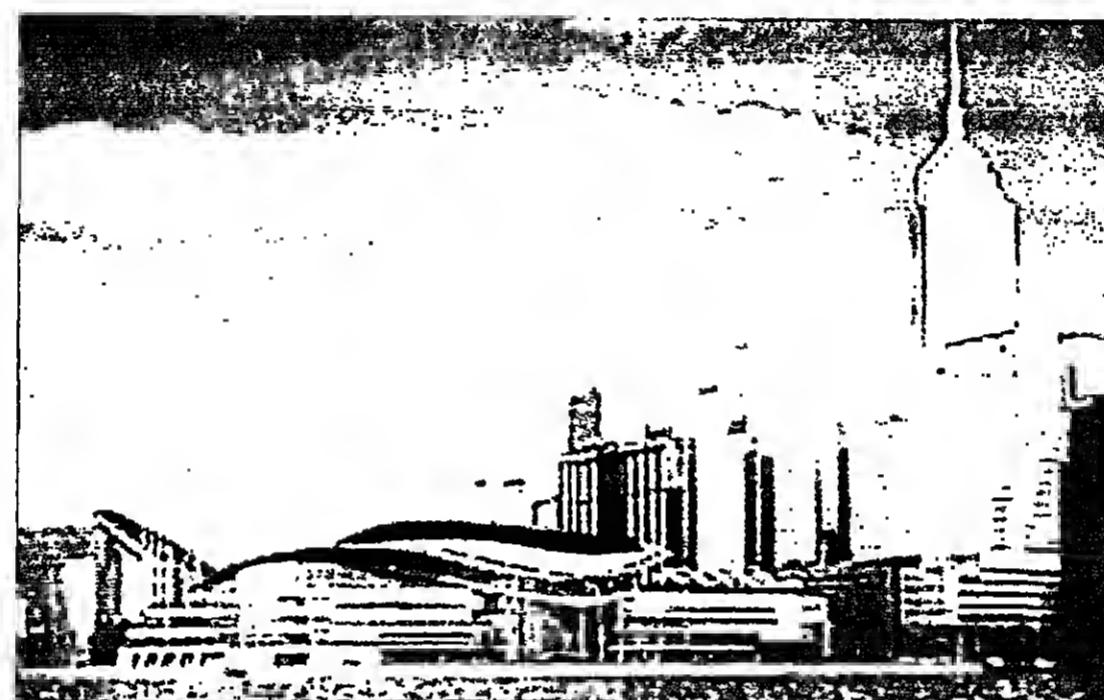
Jetting in for the meeting are such luminaries as the media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, Karl-Hermann Baumann, the chairman of the German conglomerate Siemens. Cor Boonstra, the head of Royal Philips Electronics in the Netherlands, Maurice Greenberg, the boss of the insurance giant the American International Group, and Shoichiro Toyoda, the veteran chairman of Japan's Toyota Motor Corp.

Yes, there is no doubt that the chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa, who was formerly the head of the Orient Overseas shipping line, has gathered some of the biggest names in the global business community to advise him.

They are arriving a week after Tung completed a round of meetings with groups of legislators. Without exception all those elected by a process of universal suffrage, a minority in Hong Kong's exquisitely rigged system, emerged from their meetings saying that Tung had no intention of listening to them.

They have a point: the chief executive is impatient with local politicians who do little more than put up "political shows." He feels far more comfortable with the men (there are few women involved) of business. Yet the tycoons who have traditionally been such an enormous influence in the running of Hong Kong are restive. They may have Tung's ear but they are deeply affronted by the temerity of elected politicians who criticise them for being mean during times of economic recession and for having too much influence over the government.

One of their number, a high-profile property developer called Ronnie Chan, moaned: "People



Hong Kong: A haven for the business tycoon (file photo)

used to say, before the handover: 'The communists are coming.' But the local community are the communists." That was big news to most of the people who live here, the majority of whom are refugees from Communist China.

However, Chan's definition does not quite coincide with that of Karl Marx. He defines Communism as allowing the hoipolloi to have a say in government and to press it to implement policies that are not supported by the business community. The publicly stated opinions of the local tycoons are terrifying enough in private they are even more Neanderthal in their views.

Having been drawn from this group Tung shares their prejudices and is intent on running a government free of "political meddling." The crowning irony of this authoritarian, some say arrogant, style of government is that in laissez faire Hong Kong it has led to a far higher degree of state intervention than would ever have been contemplated in Britain during the brief moments it was ruled by Labour

governments which lacked the appellation "new" before their name.

In the wake of the Asian financial crisis Tung's administration has plunged into the stock market and snapped up more blue chip shares than any other single holder of equity. In effect some 10 per cent of the market has been nationalised. As a result the stock market is far less liquid and far less attractive to overseas investors.

Before plunging into a share-buying frenzy, the government ordered a freeze on all land sales to prevent the property market from sliding into free fall — or, to put it another way, to help the big property developers from having to face drastic cuts in the vast profit margins they have traditionally enjoyed.

Whatever the motive for the government's action, it has succeeded in limiting the operation of the free market in two of the most crucial areas of Hong Kong's economy. The government says it acted to defend the local currency and to thwart

speculators, previously known as investors when they were pouring money into the former colony.

The government acted as it did because it is led by people who think that they alone can fix problems. They do not trust the market to find equilibrium. And they certainly do not trust those elected by the people to have a say in how problems can be solved.

Tung behaves much as he did when he was running his shipping empire and trying to rescue it from collapse in the 1980s. Like most Chinese companies, Orient Overseas is not famous for its democratic style of management. Decisions were taken at the top and handed down to the minions. When trouble hit the company Tung mobilised his friends in the big banks around the globe. He thinks governments can run in the same way, which is why he is such an interventionist.

The situation is exacerbated by Tung's inability to realise that the people he governs expect to see him when a crisis emerges, and expect him to explain what he is doing.

In the less than two years since Tung took control, Hong Kong has been hit by a series of crises, including a mysterious and deadly bird flu, poisoning of the seas and the worst recession in three decades. Tung has led firmly from behind.

The people whom he is leading have no recourse to the ballot box to express their discontent. Instead sullen resentment is building and taking Hong Kong into uncharted waters as the recession deepens.

As Tung's popularity ratings have steadily declined he has done what most failing governments do these days. A highly paid spin doctor has been appointed who will start work shortly. Tung, meanwhile, has been prised out of his office and started getting out and about. He still gives the impression that he has better things to do. Fortunately, he is a naturally friendly man who is actually quite good out on the streets but doesn't understand why he needs to be there.

What Tung's administration has proved is the unlikely truth that governments are actually better run by politicians, particularly those subject to elections that give them a constituency somewhat wider than a small band of tycoons who are not the ideal guardians of the public interest.

— The Independent

Poetry to inspire LA

By Karen Lowe
Agence France Presse

IN A CITY awash with moving, neon billboards splashed with come-hither parted lips and thrusting hips, this was an eye opener: dozens of white on black billboards with poetry, selling nothing.

They are from Poets Anonymous who wanted to give a gift to Los Angeles in the form of 60 billboards with excerpts of famous poets that would — they hoped — enrich the lives of pedestrians and motorists.

It was a hit and miss proposition. It brought tears to the eyes of some residents who said they were moved by the words, and shrugs of incomprehension from others — especially Hollywood high school students.

Across the street from the school were two signs at opposite ends of two blocks on Highland Street.

One perched above a pizza parlour read, "I will leave the door open until something human comes," by Lucille Clifton.

Down the street was another next to a laundromat and across the street from Paramount car wash that read, "What matters most is how well you walk through the fire," by Charles Bukowski.

Walter Sanchez, 18, looked back and forth at both billboards, waiting a few seconds for something to light up inside. "Nothing," he lamented. "I got nothing."

Jackie Barayo, 17, initially was hostile. "What is that supposed to mean?" she asked testily. After a few moments contemplation, she offered that maybe Clifton was keeping her options open, waiting for a good man.

A spokeswoman for the publicity company hired by Poets Anonymous said the poetry billboards were intended to be an antidote to the commercial spectacle that bombards those travelling around the city.

The billboards also include quotes from E.E. Cummings, Emily Dickinson, Helene Johnson, Wallace Stevens, Mark Strand and T.S. Eliot, whose poetry excerpt was particularly resonant here:

"Unreal City
Under the brown fog of a winter noon."
Debbie Ulselderger, 44, the owner of "Ruby Begonia" florist shop, said she first noticed the signs when walking to work a couple of weeks ago, and looks to them for comfort whenever she leaves, particularly the Bukowski.

"When you own a small business you go through a lot of adversity. It's a reminder that if you can handle the adversity, you'll do okay in life," she said. "It makes the traffic seem not so bad. It's calming."

Corinne Weber, 37, who describes herself as a full-time mother and full-time student, said the first time she saw one of the poetry billboards she did a mental double take.

"Like an eyelid held open hideously I am watching" — Pablo Neruda

"What is this? I didn't know if it was some kind of stunt. At first I thought it was some kind of anti-smoking campaign, or something. Now, I understand. This is so refreshing. Finally, something intelligent," she said of the quote from the Chilean poet.

She said looks forward to seeing the words of poets as she gets on the freeway or while waiting for her car to be washed at Paramount, using the poetry snippets as small mental explosives that get her thinking.

Back at the Sicilian pizza parlor under the Bukowski quote, there was puzzlement among the owners.

"What billboard?" asked co-owner Joe Yeromian. When told what the billboard above his shop said, and asked what it meant to him, he said, "Oh, you'll have to ask my brother, Rick."

Rick Yeromian, 20, was stumped and said his friend Khosro Irani, 45, sitting in a booth was the philosopher and could interpret Bukowski's poetry.

Irani rubbed his head, and then offered, "You must go back to biology. To water. We come from water. Humans come from water."

Leaving Hollywood for the 101, one of the many freeways that circles this metropolis, is a message from T.S. Eliot:

"Do I dare
Disturb the Universe?"

Under the billboard was heavy machinery and a block-sized hole in the ground where a new building was going up in front of a Holiday Inn.

Ethiopians, Eritreans lack war fervour

By Simon Denyer
Reuters

THEIR ARMIES are preparing for battle and their governments' propaganda machines are working at full throttle, but the ordinary people of Ethiopia and Eritrea do not relish the prospect of war.

"Ethiopians know what war is like," said one businessman in the north-western Ethiopian town of Bahir Dar. "This is a problem between the two governments and they should resolve it." A border dispute between the Horn of Africa neighbours exploded into war last year with hundreds of people killed in six weeks of artillery exchanges and aerial bombardments.

While the fighting died down quickly, Ethiopia and Eritrea have reinforced their positions along the 1,000 km border and have since engaged in a virulent war of words.

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the dispute are stalled, and local people say fighting could reignite at any moment.

Both governments maintain they are committed to peace. Yet every day, the state-controlled media in both countries dish up a bitter diet of vitriol about the "enemy."

A commentary entitled "Perpetrators of Evil" in the weekly Eritrean Profile last month described Ethiopia's rulers as "more evil than Satan" for their deportation of thousands of Eritrean civilians from Ethiopia.

In Addis Ababa, the press is no less scathing — even borrowing some of the vocabulary of the hated former regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam, which the current leaders of both countries fought long rebellions to topple.

The Ethiopian Herald last week dusted off a 10-year-old article denigrating Eritrea's ruling front — written in the Mengistu era. In it and other articles, Eritreans are referred to, disparagingly, as "Africa's Israels."

In other papers, lung pieces purporting to be readers' views, accuse Eritrea of killing Ethiopian civilians "in the tra-

dition of fascists and Nazis."

But the press seems a poor guide to public opinion. With both countries being watched by Republiques Sans Frontiers of regularly violating freedom of speech, the lack of free debate is all too apparent.

"They do not consult the people," said the Bahir Dar businessman. "That is the problem." The governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea came to power in 1991, after working together — despite periodic mistrust — to oust Mengistu after a long and intensely costly civil war. Two years later Eritrea took independence from Ethiopia after a referendum.

The former allies are now enemies.

'Every family in Eritrea has lost someone in the struggle... we hope the leaders and politicians remember'

But the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea see themselves as brothers who often worked and lived together, and even belonged to the same families.

Those ties were crudely broken by the war as thousands were forced to give up businesses and sometimes families in their host countries to return to their country of birth.

Relations had soured after Eritrea introduced its own currency, the nakfa, in November 1997, to replace the Ethiopian birr.

As economic rivalry intensified, Ethiopia responded by demanding cross-border trade be conducted in hard currency — hitting Eritrea in the pocket.

"We know it — we hope the leaders and politicians remember it."

8 Economy

IMF owns up to Asia mistakes

WASHINGTON (R) — The International Monetary Fund (IMF) admitted Tuesday it made mistakes in handling Asia's financial crisis, putting an overoptimistic spin on the likely economic downturn and misjudging the market's response.

But an internal document published Tuesday defended the basic thrust of IMF policy recommendations to the one-time "tiger economies" of Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea.

The IMF said high interest rates, criticised by many for dragging Asia into a still deeper recession, were needed to prevent currencies spinning even further down, and initial demands for balanced budgets did not accelerate the slump.

But the fact that growth estimates were wrong meant the fund had probably recommended more spending cuts than would have otherwise been necessary.

"Monetary policy, albeit only after some period, achieved its basic objective of avoiding a depreciation/inflation spiral in both Korea and Thailand," the IMF said in the report, its first major assessment of the international bailouts of 1997.

"This is not to deny, of course, that monetary tight-

ening had a cost for the real economy, but the alternative would have been more costly," the 147-page document added.

The IMF put together rescue deals worth some \$120 billion for the three Asian economies in the second half of 1997, urging the three to let their currencies float and carry out deep economic reforms.

Officials have said the release of the internal document was a step toward transparency — a longstanding recommendation from the IMF to its member states but one it has itself been reluctant to implement in full.

The report said the Asia programmes, large as they were, were still too small to protect countries once market confidence evaporated. But bigger programmes would have increased the risk of moral hazard — the idea that countries or investors act irresponsibly because they know some will bail them out.

All three Asian countries have plunged into recession since the rescue deals were put together, although fund officials and others say that the worst is now over.

Asian markets have responded relatively calmly to this month's economic turmoil in Brazil, which received the first payment

from its own international rescue deal last month.

But the IMF review admitted that fund forecasts of Asia's economic prospects had been deeply flawed, and that these overoptimistic projections had in turn influenced policy recommendations on tighter fiscal policies.

"The IMF, like most observers, misread the extent of the recession," the document said.

"The fund and the authorities appear to have erred on the side of optimism, in part because of concerns that realistically pessimistic forecasts would have exacerbated the situation further. But the resulting large revisions in projections were detrimental to credibility," the document added.

The IMF revised its growth forecasts down steadily over the course of 1997 and 1998, finally admitting that all three countries faced deep recession — and IMF projections were often more optimistic than those from outside observers.

Noting that the forecasters could have drawn on experience from countries such as Mexico, where a currency collapse was followed by tumbling output, it added: "The impression remains that both the fund

and outsiders erred in some ways that could have been avoided at the time."

The IMF also said problems in Asian countries meant it had been appropriate to include structural reforms in programmes agreed with the authorities. But it admitted mistakes were made here as well, particularly when it recommended Indonesia bank closures without giving investors adequate guarantees.

"The policy regarding guarantees now appears to have been ill-advised," it said, noting that the guarantee systems were different in Thailand and South Korea.

The IMF admitted it had probably been overly optimistic in its assumptions that the rescue deals would be able to restore market confidence. Delays in implementing the IMF programmes, large volumes of private sector debt and mounting concern about structural weaknesses had all unversed investors.

The IMF said more effort should be made in future crises to "bail in" the private sector, ensuring that private investors also bore a share of the costs of rescue deals, although it was not clear exactly how this should be done.

TEL AVIV (R) — The Israeli treasury's chief economist warned Tuesday that despite high interest rates the Israeli shekel remained exposed to another sharp depreciation.

"The only thing that is unclear is when the big depreciation will come and what will spark it," Tzipi Galyam who heads the state revenues administration, said in a report.

Most economists do not expect the central bank to make any significant cut in rates in the first half of the year, despite falling inflation, because of political uncertainty in the run-up to elections on May 17.

The appreciation of the local currency, high interest rates and a return to low inflation, as we have seen in recent weeks, gives rise to a feeling of déjà vu of the situation we

its base lending rate by 4.0 percentage points last November to 13.5 per cent in a bid to stem a sharp depreciation of the shekel that began in October.

The shekel has since strengthened against the dollar to about 4.06 on Tuesday from a low of 4.36 in October. But interest rates remain high, both relative to domestic inflation and overseas rates.

The danger, Galyam warned, was that when Israeli interest rates come down, savers would move to sell shekels and buy foreign currency, pressuring the shekel exchange rate.

High interest rates had also encouraged a resumption of foreign currency borrowing, she said.

The Bank of Israel hiked

had in September," Galyam said in the report.

Galyam said the Israeli economy faced uncertainty because of parliament's failure to approve the government's 1999 draft budget.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army is looking to manpower cuts to make savings in the current year,

chief of staff Shaul Mofaz announced Tuesday.

He told the parliamentary foreign and defence affairs committee the army would get rid of 250 career posts, 900 civilian employees and a thousand or so soldiers involved in non-combatant duties.

At least another 2,000 senior officers will go, including eight generals and 20 colonels who reach retirement age in the next few months.

However, General Mofaz said combat units would be reinforced.

Army to cut staff

Israeli report warns of vulnerable shekel

investment in Israel," the report said.

The Bank of Israel said Monday that foreign investment fell some 40 per cent last year.

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However, General Mofaz said combat units would be reinforced.

U.S. industries boost output

WASHINGTON (R) — Despite falling exports, U.S. industries churned out more goods during December and managed their most vigorous quarterly gain of the year during the final three months last year, the Federal Reserve has said.

Analysts said the end-of-year acceleration demonstrated the resilience of a nearly eight-year-old U.S. expansion but also noted that turmoil in Asia and Latin America were taking a toll in lost manufacturing jobs and weaker foreign sales.

Production by the nation's mines, factories and utilities increased 0.2 per cent last month after an upwardly revised dip of 0.1 per cent in November and a 0.5 per cent gain in October.

But for the full year 1998, industrial production grew only 3.7 per cent after a 6.0 per cent jump in 1997. It was the smallest rise in annual output since a 3.5 per cent rise in 1993.

Businesses ran at 80.9 per cent of their maximum capacity last month, down from 81.0 per cent in November and the weakest

since 80.6 per cent in August 1993.

A global slump in emerging markets in Asia and Latin America has sapped demand for many U.S.-made goods already, though robust domestic demand stemming from big stock market gains and strong job growth has cushioned the blow.

For example, production rates for new cars rose strongly in last year's final quarter to make up for a strike at General Motors Corp. earlier while computer output soared all year.

During the fourth quarter last year, computer production shot up at a 50.4 per cent annual rate while auto and truck output jumped at a 79.3 per cent rate.

"The problem is we're developing an unbalanced economy, one in which the manufacturing sector is dragging relative to non-manufacturing," said Robert Dederick, economic consultant to Northern Trust Co. in Chicago.

"But secondly within manufacturing, unless you're making computers, you're struggling," he added. Dede-

rick said the worst might be over for U.S. manufacturers but cautioned the outlook was clouded by woes in other countries.

Federal Reserve Governor Roger Ferguson similarly noted that events like Brazil's currency devaluation show that global prospects remained laced with risk.

"The downturn in some of the troubled economies of Asia seem to be bottoming out, at least outside of Japan, but the risk of spreading distress in Latin America creates another element of international uncertainty," Ferguson said in a speech.

The Fed said utility companies that had suffered weak demand for electricity and natural gas because of exceptionally mild weather during October and November boosted their output 1.6 per cent in December.

Manufacturing companies increased production 0.2 per cent last month after a 0.1 per cent pickup in November.

Jerry Jasinski, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, said man-

ufacturing output that makes up 85 per cent of total industrial production was not in decline.

"While it is clear that the manufacturing sector increased at a slower rate than the overall economy last year, the main reasons were lower exports and the process of reducing excess inventories," he said.

The Commerce Department said that business inventories in November increased 0.4 per cent to a seasonally adjusted \$1.083 trillion following a 0.2 per cent advance in October.

Sales also rose 0.4 per cent after a 0.3 per cent October gain, implying a healthy balance in stocks of unsold goods.

The picture remained mixed for manufacturing in 1999 after a difficult year in 1998.

"There have been 252,000 manufacturing jobs lost since March and what this output for the whole year reflects is the damage from South East Asia," said economist David Orr of First Union Corp. in Charlotte, N.C.

sporadically coming out, but such movements have not become a major stream," said Takashi Omori, domestic economic affairs director at the EPA's Research Bureau.

The EPA, which released the report earlier Tuesday, basically stuck to an overall assessment made last month, using the same phrase, "embryonic movements," to describe signs of change within an economy still in a severe state.

Omori said consumer spending had stopped falling in areas such as minicars and consumer electronics products with reasonable price tags, but added: "It is not in a situation in which the embryonic movements have been spreading."

Amid the bleak tone of his cabinet ministers, Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi put on a brave face in his keynote speech, pledging to bring the economy back to positive growth next fiscal year.

"With a combination of various policies adopted

by the government and efforts by the private sector, I am confident that the economy will recover to around 0.5 per cent growth in fiscal 1999," Obuchi said.

He said he would make utmost efforts to revitalise the economy by making 1999 "the first year of economic revival."

The EPA report also said that while a fall in the number of corporate bankruptcies in October and November from a year ago was a positive sign for the economy, corporate capital spending, from small firms to large manufacturers, had fallen.

A more hopeful note was struck in a report by Shoko Research, a leading credit research firm, which said debt from corporate bankruptcies in December fell 62.3 per cent from a year earlier to 1.02 trillion yen (\$8.9 billion), while the number of bankruptcies fell 30.8 per cent to 1,123 cases.

But an industry group said preliminary machine tool orders had fallen in December.

The Japan Machine Tool Builders' Association said December orders received by machine tool manufacturers totalled 69.2 billion yen, down 29.7 per cent year-on-year.

Domestic demand for the month fell 42.1 per cent year-on-year to 31.5 billion yen while foreign demand declined 14.4 per cent to 37.7 billion yen, it said.

The EPA's report also said job conditions had deteriorated, with Japan's unemployment rate reaching a record high 4.4 per cent in November, adding that a strong sense of uncertainty over the economic outlook remained, partly due to a recent rise in long-term interest rates.

EPA Minister Sakaya tried to remain upbeat, saying the economy was showing more signs of improvement than it had in the previous month. But clarifying a remark he made on Monday about the economy hitting bottom and starting to pick up by March, he stressed he had not said the economy had already bottomed out.

Foreign investment plummets in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — Foreign investment in Pakistan plummeted last year, central bank sources have said, a drop analysts blamed on a row between the government and independent power producers.

and restrictions designed to prevent a capital flight after last year's nuclear tests.

Total foreign investment during July to November last year shrank to \$155.5 million from \$470.5 million dur-

ing the first half of the current fiscal year ending June 1999.

The sources said portfolio investment almost disappeared, falling from \$185 million to \$30.5 million.

THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

TNSPuzzles@aol.com

ACROSS

1 Pound to a pulp
5 Thresher's waste
10 Islamic republic
14 Away from the wind
15 Equestrian
16 Scouts Wolfe
17 Himalayan snowman
18 Really miffed
19 Windmill element
20 Dickens classic
23 Track circuit
24 Hoodwinked
25 salts
28 Plead
31 Harvests
35 Ghostly visitor
In 20A
38 Tennis do-over
39 Dutch cheese
40 Hunter in the sky
41 Sorority letter
42 TV screen
43 Ill-used clerk in
20A
45 Peavish
47 Utter Ewe
48 Preliminary races
49 Circle segment
51 Weep
52 Curdudgeonly character in
20A
61 Foundry form
62 Playwright
Loos
63 1988 betting champion
64 Unemployed
65 OK
66 Rip
67 Pour profusely
68 List of candidates
69 Single-handedly
DOWN

1 Yucatan people
2 Actor Guinness
3 Eve's third
4 Family keepsake
5 Firm and fresh

6 Trumpeter Al
7 Man before Eve
8 Greek cheese
9 Reinigorated
10 Enter by force
11 Back side
12 River in Tuscany
13 Playwright Coward
21 Metrical foot
22 Grant in Hollywood
25 VCR function
26 Spanish priest
27 Shadoodles
28 Pointed remarks
29 Author Jong
30 Great honor
32 Walkie welcome
33 Little in Lille
34 FBI and ERA
36 Bovine comment
37 Alonso's queen
41 Ships on sharp runners
43 Cowshed
44 God of thunder
46 Two-wheeled carriage
50 Ivan and Nicholas
51 Frighten
52 Send out
53 Be an omen of

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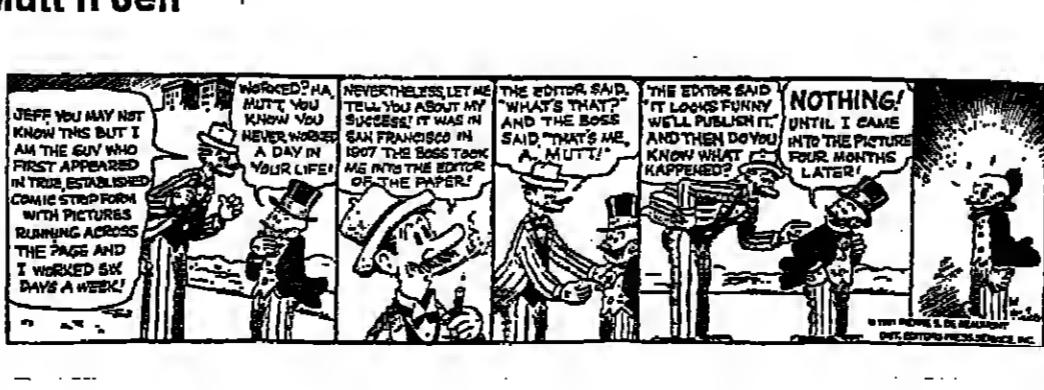
Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n Jeff



THE BETTER HALF

By Glasbergen

GLASBERGEN

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HYLYS

MOAWED

LAWASY

JUMBLE

THAT SCRABBLE WORD GAME

by Henri Arnold and Mike Arnold

Business & Finance

Jordan Times, Wednesday, January 20, 1999 9

Daily

Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Planning official prescribes mixture of economic policies to achieve goals

"THE MONETARY school under all circumstances is the weakest policy to deal with economic recession which is characterized by high unemployment rate," Yusuf Mansur, the head of the assistance coordination unit at the Ministry of Planning, said in a lecture. Noting that the inflation rate is stable, he also emphasized that the stability of the dinar exchange rate should be maintained because the dinar stability is one of the most important pillars of the economic reform programme.

Mansur explained that Jordan gives high attention to the supply side of the market or the production side which is based on rectifying production imbalances. Consequently, he said, that would improve/increase income, savings and investment as well as create employment opportunities. "However, the analyst should not forget that one of the most misgivings about this school of thought is that it revolves over benefits in the long-term," Mansur said stressing that the fruits of this strategy cannot be reaped immediately and that its effects are minimal in the short-term.

The senior planning official indicated that the reforms recommended by the supply side strategy does not affect directly the worker's pay or the return on capital but rather affects the economy through improving the circumstances that later result in higher wages and better return. He said that this is a process that could be either long or short depending on the variable and the environment where the change occurs.

"At the same time, there should be a review of the policies related to micro-economy so that the amendments would have a direct effect on the economy through upgrading the real labour wages and capital," Mansur said. As such, he added, "what

the economy needs now is a dual application of economic policies whereby the process of reform continues as if the supply is all what we have of economic policies at hand and, at the same time, activate the demand side and other theories as if the short-term benefits is all what is important."

In other words, the market role should be activated for long-term goals and spending should also be widened, deepened and encouraged by the consumer, government or investor even if that has to be accomplished at the expense of higher indebtedness, he said. However, Mansur stressed that the spending should be directed to development projects with high return on the medium and long-term fronts to be able to repay the debt and interest in the future.

Mansur admitted that economic growth slowed down during 1996 and 1997 but noted that indicators improved noticeably between 1990 and 1996 as the structural adjustment and reform programmes are based on upgrading the supply or production side of the economy. Such upgrading covers liberalising trade and removing barriers, liberalising the capital market and the movement of capital and giving the private sector the fundamental role in economic activity. In addition, the upgrading includes formulating the necessary legislations to create an attractive, competitive and advanced investment climate and the adoption of export promotion policy as the main engine for economic growth.

However, Mansur indicated that there remains a number of steps which have not yet been accomplished such as enacting new economic laws, namely, the anti-monopoly law, and the privatisation process (Al Arab Al Yuwani).

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Your plans could be disrupted today, as you worry about a risk you're about to take. Your intuition is better than usual right now, so listen to it. You may not be accustomed to having intuitive feelings at all, but don't worry. That's just your way of accessing information on a subconscious level.

Taurus: (April 20 to May 20) The sun's going into Aquarius today, in your solar 10th house of career and success. Aquarius is the sign of science and research, which is just what you need. It's not enough to be a good farmer. You also have to understand agri-economics. And you know what? You can figure this stuff out. You might surprise yourself.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Your boss, or some other older person you know, is stuck. This could be your golden opportunity. If you can see a place where your talents can be used, you can get the promotion. You could even create the job. It'll take a little research on your part, but that's OK. Go ahead and put your brains to work.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) The sun's going into Aquarius today, and that could influence your money, specifically money you share with others. Looks like there's paper work involved, too. You'd rather have a root canal than go through the pile of papers you've already accumulated, but don't panic. After you get into it, you may find you have a talent in this area.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) You're getting more attention, but not much more money yet. Don't worry. One will lead to the other. If you're a performer, you know how important it is to get out in front of people, but you may be getting a little tired of playing benefits. People are starting to task for you, though, and that's great. Grab every opportunity you get, just for the practice.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) A friend keeps telling you that everything is going to be all right. That serendipitous attitude may be a little annoying. You think your friend doesn't fully understand the situation, but that's OK. That gives him or her a clear, generous, benevolent sort of attitude. Instead of chipping away at that embrace it.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) The sun's transit through Aquarius exacerbates your natural romantic tendencies. Your ruling planet, Venus, is also in there, and so are Neptune, for fantasies, and Uranus, for electricity. And Mars is in Libra now. That means you're a wildly passionate — yet coolly intellectual — raging beast, inside. On the outside, it's Wednesday, and you have to go to work.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) This is an excellent year for romance, with a cuddly, quiet, gentle, loving, warm, compassionate type, probably a blonde. Just kidding. Could be a brunette. If you've got somebody like that in your life, chances are good you're in the mood for love, settling down, and raising a family. But first, perhaps you'd better put in for that promotion.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) There are contradictory forces in effect today. One is pushing you beyond what you've ever done, mentally. Physically, you may actually be sick, but it's more likely you've just got a lot on your mind. This condition can be dangerous, especially if you're working around machinery, so snap out of it. Pay attention to what's going on.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) Your primary interest has always been in taking care of others, but the others don't necessarily know that. You're always busy working, but they don't realize that you do it for them. Truth be known, you may find it awkward to relate to other people. It's much easier to stay busy. But you know what? You can learn.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) The sun is going into your sign today, making you stronger, more confident, and even more analytical than usual. And you'll be getting gifts, possibly even today. Looks like something valuable is coming your way. Don't gloat. You could provoke jealousies and upset an otherwise amicable relationship.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) Some change is required, but the status quo seems pretty stable. If anyone can do it, you can. There's no shifting the bureaucrats from their positions, but you may be able to find a way around them. If you present your idea clearly enough, others will be drawn to it without even knowing why.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

Revlon to cut up to 1,200 jobs

NEW YORK (AP) — Revlon Inc. will slash up to 1,200 jobs, or seven per cent of its work force, as part of a plan to boost profits at the struggling cosmetics giant.

The company also will sell some excess real estate holdings under the reorganization plan announced recently. The efforts expand on Revlon's October announcement that it would close three international plants to save costs. The restructuring comes amid tough times for Revlon, which is the best-selling mass-market cosmetics brand in the country ahead of Procter and Gamble's Cover Girl and L'Oréal's Maybelline line.

Revlon has been hurt by global economic turmoil, especially in South America and Asia.

Also troubling has been a slowdown in orders from U.S. retailers. Its biggest losses have been at drug stores, with merchants using up existing inventory before ordering more.

Outlook turns negative for major U.S., European banks

NEW YORK (AP) — Standard & Poor's has revised its outlook downward for seven major U.S. and European banks, citing financial pressures persisting in emerging markets.

The financial rating agency lowered from neutral to negative its outlook for Citigroup, JP Morgan, BankBoston, Societe Generale, Banco Santander, Dresdner Bank and ABN-AMRO Bank.

At the same time, Standard & Poor's affirmed its current ratings for the banks.

The agency also placed under surveillance the AA-1+ notes of Spain's Banco Bilbao Vizcaya and reiterated its earlier placement under surveillance of

Deutsche Bank and Bank of Nova Scotia.

"The seven outlook revisions ... are the result of continued financial stress in emerging markets. Events in Brazil are only the most recent manifestation of those problems, and are an indication that the problems are spreading beyond Asia," the agency said in a statement.

The devaluation of the Brazilian real will put

financial pressures on the indigenous banking system and increase the potential for credit losses at those overseas banks with sizeable cross-border and local currency exposure to that country," Standard & Poor's said.

This also will be the last full year of results for Mobil

BAe snaps up GEC-Marconi in first wave of European defence consolidation

LONDON (AP) — British Aerospace BAe Tuesday unveiled plans to buy the GEC-Marconi defence electronics business to form the world's third biggest and Europe's biggest defence group worth more than 15 billion pounds (\$21 billion euros, \$25 billion).

The deal, which values Marconi Electronic Systems at 7.7 billion pounds, aims to create a powerful global player to engage the dominant U.S. producers Boeing and Lockheed Martin.

It is also intended to lay the foundations of a restructuring European defence industry and a possible link with the United States.

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Also troubling has been a slowdown in orders from U.S. retailers. Its biggest losses have been at drug stores, with merchants using up existing inventory before ordering more.

The formation of the new company, which will have an order book worth 33.3 billion pounds, is intended to achieve annual cost savings of 275 million pounds after three years. Management expect exceptional restructuring costs of 200 million pounds.

Shareholders in GEC will be issued with 36.7 per cent

of the new group's capital. GEC will then be left without its profitable defence arm and will focus solely on telecommunications and consumer electronics.

BAe said that "the merger will consolidate British Aerospace's position as a world class aerospace and defence company, which is expected to be the cornerstone of further consolidation of this industry in Europe."

It added that it intends to continue discussions with other potential European partners to achieve this."

However, the initial response to the plans was frosty.

DASA, which had held intensive merger talks with BAe late in 1998 said that the deal "will make a merger between DASA and BAe impossible." DASA would be swamped by dominant British interests in such a grouping.

"This is not a European merger and it is likely to make the process of European integration more difficult," a DASA spokesman said in Munich.

French sources also said that the BAe-GEC deal ran counter to plans to create two pan-European core defence entities, one focused on aeronautics and the other on defence electronics.

French defence electronics group Thomson-CSF, which had itself been hoping to strike a deal with GEC-Marconi, called an extraordinary board meeting for Wednesday.

The new company will initially employ 99,000 people, of whom 70,000 would work in Britain. BAe said that while job losses were inevitable, it would seek to keep redundancies low.

The companies hope the deal will increase shareholder returns by 10 per cent in three years. However, the market was cool to the news.

"We are concerned that they have overpaid for the Marconi assets," a specialist trader said. "The price is looking very toppy and the fit is not that brilliant."

Big oil companies brace for brutal earnings season

NEW YORK (AP) — The weakest crude oil prices in 12 years have sparked massive layoffs and mergers on an unprecedented scale and now, big oil is set to report the largest percentage drop in annual earnings since 1992.

"1998 did not end soon enough for this industry," said Eugene Nowak, analyst at ABN AMRO Inc., who forecasts oil companies' fourth-quarter earnings will be down 60 per cent from a year ago.

This has spurred a series of megamergers and a sign of the tough times is that Amoco Corp., once the fourth-largest U.S. oil company, will not feature this earnings season, having been bought by British Petroleum Co. Plc to form BP Amoco Plc.

This also will be the last full year of results for Mobil

Corp., the second-largest U.S. oil company, which is being acquired by Exxon Corp., the world's largest publicly traded oil company.

Yet as bad as 1998 has been, some analysts are wondering whether 1999 will be any better.

"Without belaboring how pathetic the earnings picture was for the industry, the main point to make is that it does not look any better for the first half of 1999," said Michael Young, analyst at Deutsche Bank Securities.

Young predicted oil companies' earnings will fall 64 per cent in the fourth quarter and 50 per cent in 1998 from the year-ago periods.

He also noted that 1998 estimates fell 58 per cent from the start of the year and said 1999 earnings could be 35 per cent below current estimates.

The companies that will post the worst earnings comparisons in the fourth quarter of 1998 are those with the greatest leverage to oil and natural gas, such as Atlantic Richfield Co. (ARCO), which also will suffer from the sale of its chemical operations, and Unocal Corp.

ARCO's fourth-quarter earnings per share are seen down 96 per cent at five cents, according to Deutsche Bank Securities.

Evans said that the deal would allow BAe to participate in the consolidation of the defence industry "both in Europe and later in any transatlantic groups."

BAe said that "the merger will consolidate British Aerospace's position as a world class aerospace and defence company, which is expected to be the cornerstone of further consolidation of this industry in Europe."

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"We are concerned that they have overpaid for the Marconi assets," a specialist trader said. "The price is looking very toppy and the fit is not that brilliant."

The oil industry also will hit with a raft of write-downs due to the weak oil prices and charges associated with layoffs.

Tevaco Inc. last week joined Phillips Petroleum Co.; Conoco Inc., which is still majority owned by DuPont Co.; Hess and Murphy Oil Corp. when it said it would take a \$350 million charge to cover layoffs, lower product prices and a drop in the value of its

oil fields.

Texaco also said fourth-quarter EPS would be 13 cents to 16 cents.

Even refining and marketing, traditionally seen as a natural hedge for integrated oil companies, also is expected to be a negative, while chemical business earnings are slumping, due to weak Asian demand and overcapacity.

BT Alex Brown said oil companies' refining and marketing earnings are expected to fall 25 per cent from a year ago.

On the positive side, if such a thing exists in a miserable operating environment, this quarter will see earnings from Conoco, which debuted as a partly independent company after DuPont sold 30 per cent of it last autumn in the biggest U.S. initial public offering ever.

Analysts expect Conoco to report EPS of five cents for the quarter and \$1.12 for the year, according to First Call.

Companies with a balance between production and refining and marketing also are likely to report a smaller-than-average drop in earnings. Exxon is expected to report fourth-quarter EPS of 59 cents for the quarter, down 33 per cent from 88 cents per share a year ago.

There are some signs of a price recovery above the \$13-per-barrel level as inventories fall, although it will be the end of 1999 before the global surplus of 200 million to 225 million barrels disappears.

Analysts noted that capital spending cuts will result in one million barrels per day of U.S. production being locked in, which will reinforce output cuts from oil exporting nations, including the members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Schroder & Co. analyst Michael Mayer said economics may be on the cusp of a turn as inventories diminish, Asian demand recovers and production is shut in, due to lower capital spending.

Referring to the "new conventional wisdom" that oil prices will remain mired at the \$13-per-barrel level for years to come, Mayer said that opinion is just as flawed as the preceding view that oil prices had shifted to a higher range.

Yet, the bears still remain to be convinced.

"I feel we continue to witness the death spiral in the industry; earnings will be sharply below expectations, which will reduce cash flow, leading to draconian cuts in capital spending and reduced production. And so it goes on," said Deutsche's Young.

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Drugs, cheating and giant-killing dominate Australian Open

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Steffi Graf, Monica Seles, Martina Hingis and Andre Agassi demonstrated Tuesday how beautifully simple the game of tennis can be.

Jim Courier was more concerned about warning of the dangers of officiating than hurrying its head in the sand as the Australian Open became dominated by drugs, cheating accusations and giant-killing.

French Open champion Carlos Moya of Spain crashed out in four sets to Germany's Nicholas Keifer.

Former U.S. Open and Wimbledon finalist Cedric Pioline of France barely murmured as 17-year-old Lleyton Hewitt hounded him out. Six men's seeds failed to survive the opening round.

Anna Kournikova put her beauti-

fully-manicured nails at risk when she played a game of Russian roulette while compatriot Yevgeny Kafelnikov's idea of nail-biting was an intense duel with Jonas Bjorkman which saw the 1996 French Open champion stab and feint his way past the Swede's multi-layered defence.

The 17-year-old Kournikova, who seems to care more about her appearance than her tennis, struggled embarrassingly.

If she had been playing anyone but American qualifier Jill Craybas, playing her first Grand Slam outside the United States, the 12th seed would have been back on the practice courts trying to work out her serve.

Because she served an amazing 23 double faults — 17 in her first five service games — on a windy, overcast

day. The score was 7-6 (7/1), 7-5 in favour of Kournikova but it was difficult to say anyone had won a dreadful match.

The 10th seeded Kafelnikov, who played an amazing 150 matches in 1998 — three times more than Kournikova — strode through 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 against an opponent who actually played seven matches more than him last year.

It was Kafelnikov's fifth straight win over Bjorkman so he has obviously worked out how to beat him. He now plays Australian Jason Stoltenberg in the next round and could improve on his quarter-final appearance here in 1995 and 1996.

A third round encounter with former French and Australian Open champion Courier was on the cards.

But Courier was more interested in exposing the drugs cheats.

The former World No. 1, who has now slipped to 77th in the world following his back-to-back wins here and in the French Open between 1991 and 1993, won his opening match against Peter Wessels of the Netherlands, who is ranked 113th in the world.

The American went through 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7/0) and now plays Younes El Aynaoui of Morocco.

But of more immediate concern was drugs on the ATP Tour and Courier took the Association of Tennis Professionals to task for failing to grasp the nettle.

"There are some suspicious things going on that I'm unaware of that are not being properly sourced out through our testing," he said.

But countryman Todd Martin, president of the ATP Player Council, would have none of it.

"If there's an opinion it should be shared among the players and the ITF, not the press," he said after coming back from two sets down to beat Brazilian Fernando Meligeni.

The ATP called a joint press conference with the International Tennis Federation on Wednesday to explain their drugs policy.

Petr Korda, last year's champion, who had unleashed the controversy by failing a test for anabolic steroids at Wimbledon last year, was involved in another drama.

His Spanish opponent Galo Blanco accused of him feigning injury when he sprawled onto the court as his left ankle buckled. Blanco felt it gave him time to get his breath back in the third set while play was stopped as he had his ankle taped.

And the Spaniard refused to shake his hand after losing — unheard of in tennis etiquette.

Courier raised suspicions that players were using the EPO drug which improves stamina by increasing red blood cell production.

The drug was at the centre of a storm which engulfed last year's Tour de France when eight of the 20 cycling teams pulled out after police

raids discovered supplies of the drug.

On to he unseeded as he had dropped

Korda, the first defending champi-

on to 20 in the rankings. refused to talk

about drugs.

"But I want you to know I fight to the end," he said, obviously about his case which has gone to the Court of Sports Arbitration at Lausanne.

Agassi, whose belief in another Grand Slam triumph hardened after top seed Marcelo Rios of Chile pulled through injury, swept past Herman Gumy of Argentina for the loss of three games.

Women's defending champion Martina Hingis of Switzerland raced through her first round match 6-1, 6-2 against Lilia Osterloh of the United States. She now plays Elena Dementieva of Russia.

Graf, seeded 10th, was just as quick against Argentinian Paola Suarez, winning 6-0, 6-3, while sixth seed Seles was even quicker breezing past Slovenia's Tina Križan 6-1, 6-0.

Graf, who is fighting her way back to the top from a series of injuries, will play Austrian Barbara Schwanz in the second round with Seles taking on France's Alexia Dechaume-Balleret.

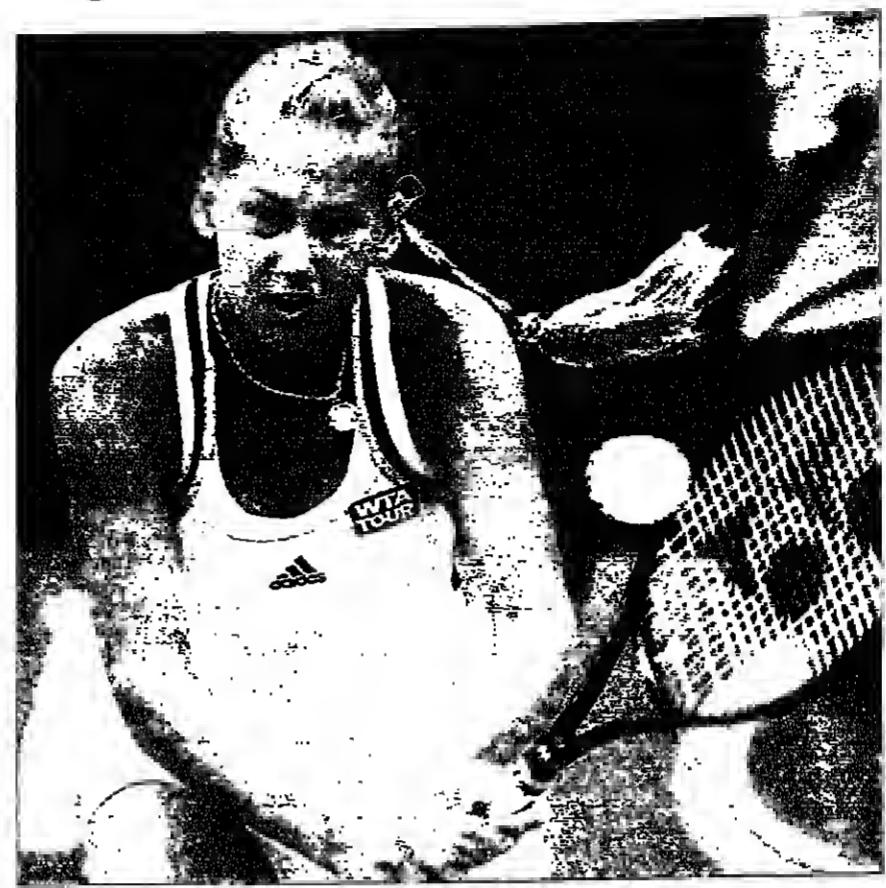
Seles is unbeaten at Melbourne, winning on the four occasions she has played since 1991.

But the final word must go to Hewitt.

"I'm not really scared of anybody at the moment," said the teenager who could well be playing Agassi in the quarter-finals.



Carlos Moya of Spain hits a return to Nicolas Kiefer of Germany during their first round match at the 1999 Australian Open in Melbourne on 19th January. Moya won the first set 7-6 and play continues (AFP photo)



Anna Kournikova of Russia hits a return to opponent Jill Craybas of the USA during their first round match at the 1999 Australian Open on 19th January. Kournikova defeated Craybas 7-6, 7-5 (AFP photo)



Andre Agassi of the USA hits a return to Herman Gumy of Argentina in their first round match at the 1999 Australian Open in Melbourne on 19th January. Agassi easily defeated Gumy 6-0, 6-3, 6-0 (AFP photo)



Tenth seeded Steffi Graf of Germany concentrates on a backhand return to Paola Suarez of Argentina during their first round match at the Australian Open in Melbourne on 19th January. Former world champion Graf won the match in straight sets 6-0, 6-3 (AFP photo)

According to the players...

MELBOURNE, Australia (AFP) — Jim Courier is always good for quotable quotes ... On Michael Chang saying he needed a miracle to play Davis Cup this year: "Yes, well he would know if a miracle was going to happen. He seems to have a pipeline."

On whether he was surprised when Petr Korda was linked to steroid use: "He doesn't look like a steroid user, does he? Of all the players I would have suspected, he's certainly the last."

Russian pin-up Anna Kournikova says she's in better physical shape than ever after spending the off-season in the gym.

"I am really happy with my physical shape," she said, after wowing a packed court one.

"I can move well. I can run well right now. I was running every day and working out in the gym and looking after myself, eating a little bit more."

Trouble was she could not serve — whacking

down 23 double faults

World No. 4 Pat Rafter has

irked tennis officials here

with his casual court attire.

The Aussie favourite, who says he was going for the beach look, wore a collarless shirt and dazzling floral shorts in his first round tie.

Officials immediately confiscated the shirt to see if it complies with tour regulations.

"I'm not quite sure if I'm going to get into trouble for that yet," Rafter said. "I was just trying to get the beach look going."

Tour regulations demand a collar.

Seventeen-year-old Serena Williams says she'll be old when she's 22 but she'll be number one.

"Five years from now — I'll be 22. Wow. I'll be old," she says.

"Five years from now I would definitely see myself at No. 1, probably for maybe a little while. I'll just take school on and off."

Steffi Graf has thrown

herself into a new cause off court, as co-founder for "Children For Tomorrow."

It is a non-profit foundation aimed at implementing and developing projects to support children who have been traumatised by war or other conflicts.

The foundation aims to

provide mainly African children, who have suffered through wars, persecution or violence with the necessary means of support and therapeutic help.

Tournament director Paul McNamee has denied a snub was involved in the decision to schedule Petr Korda's first-round match on court one.

Korda won the Australian Open last year but has been tainted by a drug scandal.

Defending champions are usually granted the honour of a centre-court start, but McNamee said the schedule was solely related to Korda's being unseeded.

The Barmy Army,

England's ribald cricket fans, are at the tennis too, though they're more subdued than usual.

England were playing Sri Lanka at the nearby Melbourne Cricket Ground and the Army decided to come over and give compatriot Tim Henman their raucous support.

"We can't be as barmy here, we're more chatty than barmy," said David Edwards, on behalf of group of 30.

Britain's big-seeding hope Greg Rusedski was odds with a loud-mouthed postman and an excited ballboy during his 6-3, 6-2 win over Australian Draper.

A man, whom Rusedski said he knew pretty well as a postman, was screaming unpleasantries at him between points while the overenthusiastic ballboy was bouncing the balls around him before he asked him to take it easy.

No big ch

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Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.

Sports

Nagano bidders gave Samaranch samurai sword

TOKYO (AP) — Backers of Nagano's bid for the Winter Olympics gave International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch an expensive samurai sword before the city was chosen, the head of the bidding committee said Tuesday.

The disclosure came a day after Nagano Mayor Tatsuki Tsukada, a senior official of the bidding committee, said the bidders also gave an IOC official, whom he did not identify, a painting worth thousands of dollars.

News of the gifts have surfaced since the Salt Lake City bribery scandal fueled questions about possible vote-buying during Nagano's successful bid for the 1998 Winter Games.

Nagano Gov. Goro Yoshimura, who chaired the bidding committee, said Tuesday that the sword was presented to Samaranch in person.

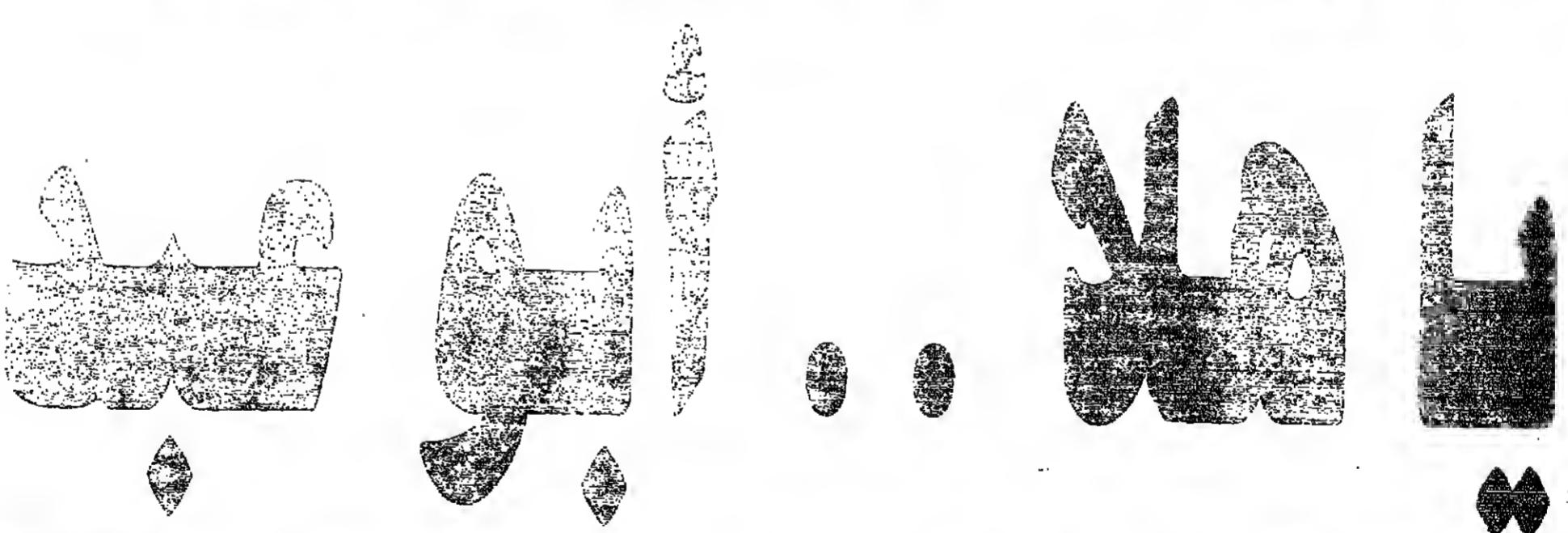
of the Nagano Olympic organising committee and the education minister, who oversees the Olympics, both said they had no plans to investigate Nagano's bid.

Makoto Kobayashi, the director general of the Nagano Olympic organising committee, said he had no responsibility in what happened during the bid because that was "totally separate" from running the games.

"We don't have any record at the IOC that it exists," said Chapman.

IOC officials are not permitted to accept gifts of more than \$150, but Samaranch has said the rule does not apply to him because he does not vote in the selection of host cities. The IOC has said that Samaranch accepts gifts on behalf of the IOC.

IOC officials also dismissed the allegations of vote-buying as "Nagano's problem."



توفيق كريشان طرباً .. و تبرق
محظى أمالنا وعنوان

توفيق كريشان وزير الشؤون البلدية والقروية والبيئة

والأمين العام وجميع موظفي الوزارة
ورؤساء وأعضاء البلديات واللجان البلدية / ورؤساء وأعضاء مجالس الخدمات المشتركة في جميع أنحاء المملكة